Sartorial Speaks To Sensorial

Threading the needle on the dialogue

between textiles and Expressive Arts Therapy.

A thesis submitted by

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Abstract

Humans have wrapped fabric around their skin since prehistoric times, creating a feeling of warmth, protection, and safety. It has swaddled us at birth and enshrouded us in death. We subconsciously dialogue with clothing daily due to temperature, mood, whimsy, threat level, sex, religion, culture, ceremony, adaptability to circumstance and environment and societal pressure. Dress and owning requires dialoguing with the world, speaking through our outfit using shape, colour, weight, textile and what feels good against the skin. L. Miller (2013), tells us,

> in its intimate relationship with our body, it bears the marks of our being, both on the surface and embedded within the structure. The strains, stresses, stains and smells we impress upon this second skin form an archive of our most intimate life. (p.2)

This thesis looks at our tactile relationship with fabric, how it taps into our sense of security and attachment and the role it plays as a cross-cultural language for healing. Through autobiographical writing, I examine fabrics in the context of emotional connection and resources and my journey to textile therapy. In my research with four different demographics, I employ a heuristic approach to explore the versatility of fabric as an intermodal medium within expressive arts therapy. I provide insight into its value as a non-judgemental art form and aim to uncover the unique qualities of textiles that expand self-expression. Regardless of any technique used, fabric permits a sensorial dialogue inviting us to connect with our memories, express our emotions and share our stories.

Keywords: fabric, textile, phenomenology, touch, expressive arts,refugee

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I dedicate this to my Nan and my Mum.

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Tapestry: Introduction

It all starts with my Nan; she is the thread that continues to weave through the tapestry of my life.

Nan loved to sew and enjoyed making clothes for her family and neighbours, an asset that was essential during World War II when rationing and resourcefulness became the new normal. In 1951, she became a seamstress at Ryde Hospital on the Isle of Wight then moved ten years later, recently widowed and a grandmother, to a new life on the mainland of England. Nan was proud to get a job at St Thomas' Hospital in London where, in 1860, Florence Nightingale founded the first professional nursing school in the world (*St. Thomas' Hospital*, 2024). Britain's oldest hospital was updated in 1871 to reflect Nightingale's hospital reform recommendations that focused on improved building standards to foster health and prevent disease for nurses and their patients (McDonald, 2012). Nan would alter and mend uniforms and make the distinguished Nightingale caps for the nurses to wear.

My mother, brother and I lived with my Nan when I was young, before my mother remarried, and one of my earliest memories was playing with the multicolored rag rug on her kitchen floor. Pushing my small fingers into the soft tufts of fabric felt both pleasant and soothing. This basic art form as described by Lynne Stein (2023), "was born out of necessity and rooted in poverty" (p. 15). Old clothing was cut into strips and pushed through a hessian sack cloth, using a simple implement such a sharpened wooden clothes peg. During the first and second world wars, the British 'make do and mend' mentality, made rag rugs very popular. Not

only did the finished rug provide warmth and comfort, the sensorial handling of textiles was of equal importance, creating calm and soothing at a time of stress and uncertainty.

My Nan's sterile work environment at the hospital was a stark contrast to the colour and texture of her home which oozed with creativity, fabrics of all patterns & textures, boxes of buttons, and embroidered baskets full of wool balls, trims and baubles. Exploring this emporium was to play without limitation. It wasn't messy, no tools were needed, no clean up. The shaping of the play was immediate, chairs could be draped with sheets to create caves, castles, and tunnels. Fabric could be manipulated to make instant objects required for story themes. Best of all, with a simple wrap or tuck, I could transform myself with a chosen piece, its weight and texture adding to my imaginary character.

My Nan: Poem included in an in memorandum piece EGS 2022

I remember your red painted nails and your hand knit sweaters,
shelling peas in the back garden, banana split sundaes,
you were a beacon of fun.
Creative and cool,
non judgemental,
non-conformist,
my Nan

It's been a long time,
but I can still hear your laugh.
Feel your arms around me,
taste your fruit cake,
see the twinkle in your eye.

You introduced me to fabrics and taught me to sew,
scatter the buttons and wrap in the trim.
You ignited my passion
and never lost sight of your own.

You made me feel special, held, safe, seen,
how blessed I was to be guided by you.
I speak of you often,

I know you are close,
you are the thread that weaves through the fabric of my life.
My Nan.

My sensorial memory takes me back to a time of innocence, when there was warmth, a sense of safety, protection, attachment, security, creativity and joy. Today, my Nan's leopard print coat hangs in my closet and even though the lining is unraveling in places, it remains one of my most treasured possessions. It retains her scent and I love it being mixed with mine. Its softness and weight feel like her arms wrapped around me, holding me close.

Nan collected old Hollywood film books from the 1930's onwards and what I saw on those pages was a world away from 1970's England. Photos of beautiful people draped in shiny and shimmering fabrics, the likes of which I'd never seen. These books were a portal into another world where costume was shaping a story. My imagination was unveiled. My Nan made a lot of our clothes when we were young. She passed her knowledge on to me, first with rudimentary hand sewing and eventually the chance to experience her precious Singer sewing machine. This opened endless possibilities, to layer, pleat, ruffle, and with this new skill I started designing and making my own clothes.

I loved visiting her and being in a warm inviting hub of creativity, a place of harmony where I could freely explore the arts. I formed a strong emotional connection to my Nan. This was in direct contrast to my life with my mother and stepfather, where emotions were not communicated or valued.

In my mid-teens, I started to create clothes that sent a message that made me feel safe. The punk movement was exploding in the UK, and it provided an alternative environment, the freedom to express through fabric. It provided me with armor, a mask, androgyny, safety and community. My Nan didn't judge when I visited her with my unusual clothes and multicoloured

hair, her eyes would twinkle as she laughed and said “y’er daft apeth.” To her I was the same girl. Roughly translated, it’s a Yorkshire statement derived from ‘you daft halfpenny worth.’ Rather than an insult, it was said in a friendly, endearing way to suggest someone is silly.

In my late teens, my family life became increasingly difficult. My mother was emotionally cold and not a comforting maternal presence to me. I eventually felt more and more disconnected, unwanted, and hopeless. All this took me to a very dark place. Rather than embracing me, holding me close and showing concern for my emotional well-being, my mother forced me to leave home. My attachment to my Nan remained strong, but she had moved some distance away and visiting her required a long train and coach journey.

I still needed to attend school, so I continued to study art and history at college and found temporary accommodation in a nearby facility for youth at risk. I felt scared and out of my depth, as most of the residents were recovering drug addicts or had moved there from juvenile detentions. Their protective walls were up, and the volatile energy was palpable. It was here, though, in this unfamiliar space, that I began to learn the power of art and how it could build connection. Levine (1992), posits that “the use of the arts as a means of healing the soul testifies to the inherent power of men and women to confront their own pain” (p. 7).

Most evenings after college I would paint in my room, and gradually other youth would gather and join me. McNiff (1992), observed during his early work “how the affirmation of a group's diversity furthered the vitality of individual expression. Creativity is a contagious force” (p. 22). In these painting sessions we shared compassion and understanding for our struggles. Connections were formed and for a few hours we felt a freedom from our situation. Through art-making, we found a way to change our environment. Our cold, sterile rooms, once blank

canvases, were now imprinted with our individuality and adorned with our art. We had created a space that felt safe, uniquely ours, yet clearly laid bare our battle scars. Some of my housemates were illiterate and were always eager to paint. I later realized the importance of this outlet for expression and storytelling.

I left the home some months later, feeling stronger, calmer and with a renewed curiosity for the future. I decided to further my education by pursuing a degree in theatre set and costume design and immediately saw fabric through a new lens. The choices now were limitless; there was a sensorial integration between my vision and touch as I ran my fingers over bolt after bolt of fabric. Every shade of colour, sheen, shimmer, texture, weight and transparency was unfurled and the play began. Wrapping it around myself by tucking, twirling, pleating and enshrouding, I would instantaneously move from light and wafty, to heavy and burdened, the fabric easily gliding through my fingers, or grating against my skin. Moving from the most exquisite sensation to the most uncomfortable was a sensory awakening that became a new emotional language.

During this period at art school, I began to move away from my teenage despair towards hope. Art and creativity became my safe space, a place where I could explore and imagine, and ultimately find balance and form healthy relationships. I loved designing costumes, sampling swatches, draping fabrics, moving from the 2D sketch into the 3D reality. I began to witness actors transformed by the weight, shape, colour and texture of fabric. Their sense of knowing the character increased when wearing the costume, how they moved, gestured, spoke, interacted all came into play. A dialogue would occur between us, to adjust, layer, reshape, add or remove. This new garment next to the character’s skin, needed to belong.

I think I clocked this on a subconscious level, but it was more than a decade later when my second son, Elliott, was born, that I started to register the therapeutic benefits of fabric. April 1st, 1996. After a week of concerns about my unborn child, Elliott was deemed an emergency and was brought into the world at top speed. Two months early at 2 lbs, he appeared surprisingly intact. A few days later he was clinging to life, and we were being told to prepare for the worst. I was a walking ghost, still wearing the clothes I had gone into the hospital in, the large overalls no longer filled now sagged where my baby should have been. Elliott was too weak to hold. I was shown a small hole at the bottom of the incubator where I could put my finger and stroke his perfect foot. How would he know to keep going? What would give him strength? His experience of the world thus far had been needles and tubes, not the softness of my skin or the security of being swaddled.

I learned to communicate with the touch of that one fingertip. His organs would shut down, but the skin was still thriving and I relied on that tactile process to stay strong and positive. I turned once again towards fabric. I needed to make Elliott a blanket. I landed on a pattern with animals and what looked like drawings of Indigenous people on horseback carrying spears. I imagined that this blanket would give my little warrior boy strength as he fought the battle with his health. Working with the soft fabric was comforting and helped me to focus, as I cut, pinned and stitched, all in preparation to wrap it around him when he left the hospital.

Figure 1: Elliott's Blanket

Elliott made it home a couple of months later and slowly reached milestones, although walking, talking and using his left arm were either slow or limited. Over the years, it was clear that regardless of his physical and mental disabilities, he had a strong spirit and vivid imagination. I had a big pile of fabric that was available for my sons to rummage through, that was reminiscent of my own childhood at my nan's house, and both boys used these swaths of fabric to play and create new identities. Jak was always the insect or animal, while Elliott wanted to be the superhero with strong limbs and extraordinary powers.

In the years that followed, I wove my busy career as a costume designer with my work as a mother. Elliott's health was often precarious, and my central nervous system could rarely relax. I didn't have the knowledge or resources to ground myself and found little harmony in my life. It was like trying to sew leather to chiffon. One heavy, protective, dense, durable and tough, the other transparent, drapey, shimmery, light, floaty.

When I think of how my world felt at that time, the fabric that comes to mind is linen with slubs. Slubs occur in the spinning process and are woven directly into the cloth, giving the appearance of an uneven knot or defect on the surface. Rather than push against the slubs, I

started to look at how I could incorporate them into the fabric of my life. It was clear that the more I used fabric with Elliott, the more fulfilled and regulated I felt. Watching him embody the characters I created and witnessing the calming benefits, unlocked my desire to use my art in a healing capacity and search to find a vocation that aligned with my values.

I was in my late forties, divorced with two children to raise,constantly juggling long days on film sets, with childcare, therapeutic appointments for Elliott and being present for my kids. Greta, the woman, daughter, sister, aunt, friend was just holding together.

My Nan had passed away leaving a huge void in my life.

My exterior belied the interior.

Enter the desire for change, and there it was: expressive arts therapy.

By beginning with myself, I was able to appreciate how fabric and textiles had woven throughout my life both creatively and emotionally which led me to my research question: How does the dialogue we hold with fabric, which encompasses our memories and emotions within its fibers, support expression, healing and growth within an expressive arts therapy setting? My journey of exploration was an experiential one that involved qualitative arts-based research, autoethnography and ethnography. With phenomenology and textiles as my guide, I uncovered beautiful surprises that folded into the integral structure of my thesis and developed a more potent internal and external dialogue with touch.

Literature Review

This literature review developed my journey with fabric as if my Nan was leading me by the hand. It was at times daunting, overwhelming, illuminating, and joyous. I found myself sharing new pieces of information and often stopping to read out loud paragraphs I marveled upon. Understanding the remarkable layers of our skin and how we process information through touch, brought new respect. I looked more closely at my hands, with a different appreciation, like a spectator watching from the sidelines now fully in the game, as they expanded and contracted, held, and released, skimmed, pressed and prodded. Delving into the wonder of cloth and textiles expanded my own relationship with clothing and home furnishings; I often closed my eyes to deepen the tactile connection.

From humble beginnings of spinning to the rhythmical interweaving of warp and weft fibers into finished cloth, both the handling and the making of textiles continue to exhibit beneficial qualities for healing, expression, and connection.

Theory of Phenomenology

Phenomenology. I found it very difficult to pronounce this word. I was constantly tongue-tied with letters and sounds rolling together until my thesis advisor, Dr. Bonnie Nish, suggested that I think about the Muppets, and there it was. I could easily recall The Muppet Show tune explaining phenomena and visualize the characters with all their unique textures as if I was touching them. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dnk0Be4a0aw

Phenomenology is the study of experience, and how we experience our experience.. Cloth and clothing has been our constant companion in one guise or another through the experience of life from birth to death and has played silent witness to all that unfolds. As a protector, shelter, comfort, identity, symboliser, and form of expression, we wear it as a second skin and in turn it holds our experiences, our memories and emotions within its fibers. To understand our world and our place in it, we need to make sense of it. To make sense of it, we need to examine every aspect of our lives.

Phenomenology does just that, as David Woodruff Smith (2018) states: "Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view" (para 1) as he further details, "Literally, phenomenology is the study of 'phenomena': appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience" (para 3).

Knill et al. (2005) advances this,

> In my actual existence, I find myself in a world which I have not made, this world is given to me as a realm of interconnected significance, a system of meaning in which I must locate myself and my projects. Moreover, I am not alone in the world; rather, I find myself in the world with others. My being-in-the-world is a being-with-others. (p. 24)

We experience the world through the things we come into contact with on a daily basis that shape and reshape our world. My subjective lived experience with fabric and textiles, is my motivation for their inclusion as a component of expressive arts therapy. As Knill et al. explains, "A phenomenological approach is basic and essential to the successful practice of intermodal expressive therapy" and is guided by the 'thing' that emerges (2004, p. 23).

Phenomenology came into popular acceptance in the early 20th century and drew from the philosophies of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Friedrich Nietzche (1844-1900), and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). These were later followed by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and others. Their core question was the nature of existence itself, particularly the possibility for people to form vibrant and authentic lives by fostering the capability for awareness and authentic self-expression. Husserl addressed this question in a new discipline, which he termed *"Phenomenology."* They put forth that the being's experience is the 'phenomenon.' Even more important to take into account is the being having the experience, in conjunction with their feelings, imagination and meaning (Halprin, 2008).

Smith (2018), describes how "phenomenology studies the structure of various types of experiences ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity." (para 8). How do beings perceive the experience? What do we think about it? How will we remember it since memories alter, fade, hide and resurface. Our imagination can help fill in the gaps. What emotion will we choose to direct at the phenomenon? For example, if we have experienced trauma in the past, we may have an entrenched way of perceiving things going forward. Desire, volition and bodily awareness; how do we move in the world? How do we relate to others and how do we physically get through our day? A part of the response to the phenomenon is the desire of what we want it to be and the volition is in our choosing. Do we play well with others? How do we relate to other beings through linguistics spoken or written? How eager are we to understand others in order to relate and connect?

Husserl coined the term “intentionality” to describe the typical structure of these forms of experience, meaning that when phenomena show up we direct every aspect of our lived experience toward it. Martin Heidegger worked as Husserl’s assistant in 1916 and had his own ideas about phenomenology, as evidenced in his early work, *Being and Time* (1927). Smith (2018), references this book, “for Heidegger, we and our activities are always ‘in-the-world,’ our being is ‘being-in-the-world” (para 41). Pulling from that, we explain what we do and what things mean to us by contextualizing our lived experience in the world and everything in it, otherwise we feel adrift.

What have we experienced by being in the world? Does it make sense? How it filters through depends on, among other things, our own moral and ethical codes. Phenomenology factors how the individual truly experiences their reality, and what they think, feel, sense and imagine in the moment. The degree to which we are affected by phenomena is also based on four other main philosophies; Ontology (the study of being or what is), Epistemology (the study of knowledge), Logic (the study of valid reasoning) and Ethics (the study of right and wrong action) (Smith, 2018). Heidegger saw humans as having a choice to live an authentic or inauthentic existence, by firstly accepting responsibility for their own existence as an authentic being-with (Knill et al, 2005). The more authentic a person is, the more empathy that person has for others.

In his article on Martin Heidegger for the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Michael Wheeler (2020), put forward Heidegger’s theory on our relationship to objects in which he suggested that they have their own distinctive kind of being. When the object is seen and contemplated, that mode of being is what he called “presence at hand.” By engaging it in activity, the specific “manipulability"of the object is revealed, one that it has established in its own right. He called this kind of being “ready-to-hand.” Further, when we engage the object, we

no longer contemplate it, we are absorbed in the activity and have no awareness of ourselves (Wheeler, 2020). In his later works, Heidegger had a “turn” in his thinking and looked towards the experience with works of art as a fundamental way to understand the existence of the human being, or *Dasein* (Knill et al, 2005).

Following from Husserl and Heidegger’s work, Maurice Merleu-Ponty (1908-1961) focused his thinking on the concepts of expression, particularly in language and the arts. He used literary and artistic examples to describe the various ways that we perceive and reflect, and drew on parallels between the artist and the thinker to create a broad theory of expression as the foundation for a philosophy of history and culture (Toadvine, 2023). His first essay on painting was called ‘Cézanne’s Doubt’ (1945) in which he reveals that the concern for Cézanne’s mental health led his childhood friend Zola to refer to him as “a genius gone wrong” (p. 1). Merleu-Ponty suggested that the artists’ lived experiences were present in the phenomena born into the world and it is from the work that Cézanne is telling us, this is who I am and this is how I see the world. Merleu -Ponty (1964) puts forth that “we get to know his work first and see the circumstances of his life through it” and further “ the truth is that *that* work to be done called for *that* life” (p. 20).

Merleu-Ponty (1964), argues that "art is not imitation, it is a process of expression” (p. 17). The painter recaptures his world and brings it forth for our witness as visible objects that, without him, would remain confined in the solitary life of each persons’ consciousness. Merleu-Ponty (1964) quotes Cézanne,“The landscape thinks itself in me and I am its consciousness" (p.17). He highlights that Cezanne attempted to offer us a glimpse of how, through his paintings, he perceived the world.

In his final essay “Eye and Mind,” Merleau-Ponty returns to the analysis of painting and

introduces the term ‘Intertwining' or ‘Overlapping,’ to describe how the artist contextualizes themselves in the world and how they bring forth a representation of their experience of the world (Toadvine, 2023). Cezanne’s previous comment about how he experiences the landscape, is essentially him saying that he touches the landscape and the landscape touches him and out of those two dimensions a third comes forth on the canvas as a visual representation of how he perceives and dialogues with the world.

The Phenomenology of Touch

By being in the world there is a connection between our body and the world. When we actively touch something, we have an awareness of something other than our body. Skin is the boundary of where our body meets the world and it is here that tactile feelings are felt. Ratcliffe (2008) references Martin who explains that “one measures the properties of objects in the world around one against one’s body. So in having an awareness of one’s body, one has a sense of touch” (p. 93). Touch is both an externally directed and an internally directed proprioception or bodily sense. Ratcliffe (2008) references O'Shaughnessy who puts forth that touch and proprioception are in fact mirror images of each other by telling us, “one sense leading us outwards beyond ourselves, the other taking us back into ourselves” (p.86).

Touch appears to be more complex. There is the phenomenological difference between actively touching something and being passively touched: without movement or proprioception in touch the tactile experience is limited. The line between active and passive becomes blurred. Ratcliffe (2008) quotes Merleu-Ponty, who illustrates, “Passive touch tells us hardly anything but the state of our own body and almost nothing about the object. Even on the most sensitive parts

of our tactile surface, pressure without movement produces a scarcely identifiable phenomenon" (p. 88). In contrast, active exploration through touch informs us of characteristics such as rough, smooth, soft, hard, wet, prickly,sharp, oily or sticky and provides us with an image that is much richer than one noted purely with vision (Ratcliffe, 2008).

Another component of touch is the absence of touch or tactile contact, for example how the naked body feels walking in a room of neutral temperature. There is a noticeable difference in how the body feels without clothing touching the skin. Ratcliffe (2008) mentions Merleau-Ponty who posits, "if I touch a piece of linen material or a brush, between the bristles of the brush and the threads of the linen, there does not lie a tactile nothingness, but a tactile space, devoid of matter, a tactile background" (p. 89).

At the time of Merleu-Ponty's death, he was working on manuscripts for a book on 'the visible,' perception, and 'the invisible' language and truth. In the chapter The Intertwining-The Chiasm, he discusses the body as having a combination of both a subjective experience and objective existence, a notion he terms 'flesh' and concentrates on the phenomenon of touching one hand with the other. He puts forth that the two dimensions at play here are both a tactile experience and one of being touched. This works in reverse as the hand that touches is also tangible, and can be touched by the other hand. It is this reversible quality that Merleu-Ponty saw as the essence of the phenomenon (Baldwin, 2004). He further contemplates that in 'touch' there are three dimensions that though different have distinct areas of overlap. As the hand moves and touches externally, at the same time, it feels from within and, as Merleu -Ponty (1968) puts forth, can experience a "veritable touching of the touch, when my right hand touches my left hand while it is palpating the things... the 'touching subject' passes over to the rank of the touched"

(p. 3). The body therefore can be seen as both object and subject, a criss-crossing between the touchable and the tangible (Merleu-Ponty, 2004).

If we understand phenomenology as being led by the phenomenon that shows itself, then art has a central aesthetic position within this philosophy. Knill et al. (2005) describe how "the significance of the work emerges out of the materials from which it is made, meanings emerge through a shaping of that which is given" (p. 31). Expressive arts therapy has art and solution orientation at its core. By engaging with the arts, the client brings their unique life experience subconsciously into the form and the piece that emerges is a new phenomena for both client and therapist. The phenomenological approach means that we take into account the client, the issues, the emotions, the form and what is created as it emerges in the moment (Knill & Eberhart, 2023). In referencing Max Van Manens' book *Researching Lived Experience* (1990), Knill (2015) suggests that the phenomenological approach engages "an attentive practice of thoughtfulness" (p. 12). Levine (2015) expands further, that in the therapeutic setting we adopt a "caring and attuned way of being with, and approaching, the subject or phenomenon" (pp. 10-11).

The relationship between client and therapist requires the therapist to be present and open, and to abstain from interpretation, evaluation and criticism. Knill & Eberhart (2023) suggests that it "requires keeping an eye on the wholeness of the situation while appreciating the detail" (p. 195). Levine (2015) describes how, in the architecture of a session, there is a pause for the client and therapist to reflect on the activity and the form that arrived. "It shows itself to us and we look at it and simply describe its properties as it is given to us" (p. 71). We move away from interpretations and seek to understand the phenomena as it shows itself. This aesthetic analysis, advanced in the discipline of Expressive Arts therapy and stays close to the art and the

senses. Here, rather than judgements or finding explanations about the art piece, the focus is on the experience of the making or doing and the feelings that arrived in the process (Levine, 2015).

It would seem to be a reasonable assertion that since fabric and textiles have been part of our lives from birth to present day, their inclusion as an art modality within expressive arts therapy would be beneficial for accessing our lived experiences in a fully sensorial way.
If we relate textiles to Heidegger's concept of 'present at hand,' it cross-culturally fits the mold and is usually accessible to the client either on their person, within the arts space, or in their home. The fabric is at hand, waiting for the subject-object encounter, and for the client there is rarely any hesitation. The tactile connection to a piece of fabric can be immediate, an instant access to thoughts, feelings and memories through the haptic dialogue between nerve endings and the brain. Almost as if in a single touch our entire lived experience rushes forward into our fingertips. By staying on the surface and engaging other senses such as sight, smell and hearing, the fabric 'speaks' to us, it recalls our lived experience. In the shaping and manipulation of the textile, a new form emerges, one that comes forth from the imagination as the phenomenon .

Broadcloth: A History of Fabric

The history of textiles gives insight to the materials available in different cultures and eras and the resources applied to its manufacture, speaks to its prominence in most human societies.

There is a good assumption that Neanderthals were using animal fur and skins as clothing for warmth and protection against the elements, but evidence of this is scarce, as organic materials haven't been preserved further back than 100,000 years. In 2021, new confirmation

came to light after researchers discovered 62 bone tools at the Contrebandiers Cave in Morocco. In her article, When Did Humans Start Wearing Clothes? Discovery in a Moroccan Cave Sheds Some Light, Hunt (2021), reveals that they "may be some of the earliest proxy evidence for clothing in the archaeological record. The tools are between 90,000 and 120,000 years old." (para 2). Their shape was irregular and polished, suggesting they had been regularly handled by humans and their scratches and grooves indicated they had been used to prepare animal skins. Although bone tools had been unearthed before, the location of this discovery and the mild climate at that time, brought into question whether animal skins and furs were being used not only for protection but also adornment and status within the tribe (Hunt, 2021).

The turning point at which humans initiated weaving plant fibers into cloth is unknown, but linen is believed to be one of the earliest fabrics due to the finding of dyed flax fibers dated to 36,000 years ago. The discovery in Turkey was of an intact piece of linen bound around the handle of an antler tool and as Thanhauser (2022) describes, it "had miraculously been preserved because of contact with calcium in the bone" (p.7). This remnant of fabric was dated to 7000 BC which certainly places it as a historical marker to support that theory (Thanhauser, 2022). Given the climate, this rudimentary fabric was ideal for clothing. It was cool to the touch, more resistant to ultraviolet rays and dried quickly. It was used extensively in ancient Egypt as evidenced by the discovery of textiles, tools and tomb drawings, giving insight into, not only how linen was produced, but also early indications of style using ornamentation and pleating (Heinrich 1992).

The production of cotton started as early as the 5th century, with findings of the plant in Asia, Africa and South Western America and the invention of the cotton gin or 'cotton engine.' This elementary machine consisted of a narrow roller and flat base which enabled the careful

separation of cotton fibers from their seeds. In later centuries, the high demand for this versatile fabric led to the development of more competent versions in the United States which allowed for cotton fibers to be separated from their seeds with greater efficiency (Lakwele, 2003). In other cultures, the evolution of textile manufacturing was supported by the discovery of felt, hemp, wool and silk cloths. It is this variety and flexibility of fabric that has contributed to the internal and external conversational thread that has intrinsically woven throughout mankind.

Whether clothing be protective, supportive, adorning, ceremonial, confining or dehumanizing, it gives voice to our mood, whimsy, profession, religion, environment, social standing, and culture and identity. It informs us and gives way to a narrative that spans generations. It is able to carry stories in its fibers and evokes memories with its scent.

Drape: Skin

Skin is considered the body's largest organ, through which we receive tactile stimulation. Touch, pressure, temperature and pain are relayed through individual nerves to the brain, the information received is processed, allowing the mind and body to respond in concert. The sensory homunculus, the brain's map of the body, identifies sensations. We experience a more extensive range of sensitivity, in parts of the body with a higher density of nerve endings. Lyman (2019) asserts, "The skin on the fingertip on our forefinger with its considerable density of sensory receptors, requires the attention of a proportionally much larger area of our brain's 'skin map' than, say, the skin on our back" (p.116). The hairless skin found mainly on our fingers, palms and soles of our feet is called glabrous and comprises of four groups of mechanoreceptors.

The Merkel or touch cells, which are abundant in our fingertips, sense the slightest of vibrations and send detailed surface information to the brain.

Just beneath this layer are the Meissner skin receptors or tactile corpuscles, which speak to the brain pertaining to the hold and release of pressure. They sense even small indentations such as the tangible stimulation of our clothing when we get dressed. As the pressure on the skin is released we are then unaware of them next to our skin throughout the day. The third Pacini receptors lie deep in the skin and are dense in our hands and feet, they sense variations of touch and pressure that is essential to our understanding of where our bodies exist in time and space. The Ruffini endings or fourth mechanoreceptor layer is in both glabrous and hairy skin, it detects the stretching of skin when joints are moved (Lyman, 2019).

It is comforting to think that this incredible organ can communicate love, soothing and comfort with the touch of a mother's fingertip to her newborn's foot.

Fibre: Touch

I realize that considering the importance the sense of touch has played in my life, I knew very little about it. I was aware of its prolonged absences in my childhood and its vital importance when I became a mother, but I only recognised its unique dialogue between my internal and external world, when I stepped into expressive arts therapy.

As one of our senses, it is the least understood and often underappreciated which is surprising given that the sensation covers the surface and some of the interior of the body. To experience feeling through touch as Subramanian (2021) explains, "we need the sensation emanating through the skin, the capacity for movement, and proprioception, or our knowledge of

where our bodies stand in space" (p 27). Touch then, acts as our guide for navigating our interactions with each other and the world. Phenomenologically, physically touching something or someone gives us context, the external tactile sensation will always inform the internal. For example, in a handshake with another person, the nonverbal dialogue between the two hands contextualizes their relationship through pressure, duration and vigor and informs them how the other walks in the world. Lyman (2019) tells us, "Touch is exquisitely sensitive. It is emotional. It influences our thinking and sense of self " (p. 121). It gives us a hands-on approach to life and learning that oscillates between what the skin experiences and how that informs our emotions (Subramanian, 2021).

Touch is both our first and final sensation, given that it is the first one we develop in the womb and the last one to lose as we age. Babies associate the touch from their parents with the knowing that they are cared for, and we have recognised that skin-to-skin contact or 'kangaroo care' is relaxing and calming for both newborns and parents. Holding or stroking the hands of the elderly can produce a similar effect, even when other senses are lost, touch can transmit comfort and connection and information from one body to another (Lyman, 2019).

In the first months of life, babies receive milk from the mother's breast; there is a softness and smell to the skin they orally navigate, and from here they start to discover their own fingers and toes by sucking and touching. The baby perceives this as an extension of themselves. Gradually, as they explore their environment through touch, their fingers may start to feel the edges of their blanket which they bring up to their mouths. Winicott (1971), called this "transitional phenomena" as the development phase between 'me' and 'not me' (pp. 4-5). Following this, the child continues to explore and often discovers a soft toy or blanket that has a familiar tactile sensation and this becomes their first 'not me' or 'transitional object.' Winnicott

(1971), puts forward that this object “must seem to the infant to give warmth, or to move, or to have texture, or do something that has a reality of its own” (p. 7).

In 1956, Charles Schultz’s *Peanuts* cartoon introduced the character of Linus as Lucy’s younger brother who was usually seen sucking his thumb and holding his blanket to his cheek. When Charlie Brown enquiries why he does this, Lucy replies “I think maybe it gives him a feeling of security” (Chung, 2007). This important object ‘speaks’ to the child, as they experience its felt sense to soothe, allay anxiety and provide a rudimentary sense of where they are in the world (*proprioception*.) while also holding steady as the receiver of the child's emotions. The much-loved item, especially if it's made of fabric, can retain comforting smells and hold shape regardless of any worn threads and fading.

On a personal note, when I examine the soft toy rabbit from my childhood, I’m curious if its torn and tattered ear is indicative of the level of stress I felt. Its once plush fabric body is now tightly matted, a testament to its durability and my physical devotion. Today it stands as a snapshot into my formative years, a special emotional object that provided me with a thread of connection to the country I left as a baby and accompanied me when I returned as an adult.

Figure 2: My childhood rabbit

Hypersensitivity to touch

In their research on hypersensitivity in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Sena & Barros (2024) put forth that "Hypersensitivity is a common trait in many children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), making them more sensitive to sensory stimuli from the environment such as sounds, textures, tastes and odors, balance, and posture" (p. 1). Individuals with highly sensitive nerve endings can find certain fabrics and physical touch overstimulating and impossible to tolerate, yet the benefits of touch to calm the nervous system have been highly documented. Author Tiffany Field (2014) writes that when we experience touch, "anxiety and stress levels, both behavioral and biochemical, are reduced and the general effect is a relaxed, more attentive state" (p. 14).

Dr. Temple Grandin, who is on the spectrum, has written extensively about the impact of touch, how it can both alarm and soothe the nervous system depending on light or deep pressure touch (DPT) and how that led to her developing a 'squeeze machine' to overcome anxiety and introduce the concept of a simple hug into her life. She explained that "as a child, I craved to feel the comfort of being held, but I pulled away when people hugged me" (p. 66). Her machine, which required the person to lie inside, was fitted with thick contoured foam rubber padding that provided deep touch stimulation to both sides of the body at the same time, it was also operated manually, allowing the person to control the amount of pressure they received (Grandin, 1992). Following Grandin's 'hands off' approach, research has shown that weighted blankets can provide similar DPT sensations like swaddling or firm touch to improve the sleep of children with ASD. A study on the impact of weighted blankets on sensory sensitivity and insomnia,

found that they also aided adults with anxiety disorders, sensory sensitivities and moderate to severe sleep disorders (Davis-Cheshire et al, 2023).

In my work with children in elementary schools, those who came from families with generational poverty, would often wear the weightier fabric as they played in the art space or request many layers to be placed upon them, finding their own way to calm in an overly stimulating environment.

Figure 3: Student wrapped in grey fun fur

I stumbled upon something familiar in my research in how I correlate touch with emotion when I handle fabrics. In their article for Frontiers in Psychology, Mylopoulos & Ro (2013) suggest that "Synesthesia is a condition in which individuals experience atypical responses to certain types of stimuli, in addition to the typical responses elicited by those stimuli." A form of cross wiring occurs between the senses resulting in a person making particular connections, for example identifying numbers by color or linking food tastes to emotions (Submarianian, 2021).

This condition is not uncommon, however. In Submaranian's book, *How to feel: a rare phenomena of touch,* emotion synesthesia was revealed. What started as a casual conversation, led David Brang and his colleague V.S. Ramachandran to study a friend, AW, in a lab setting where they recorded the feelings that arose as she held different textures.The results included leather equating to her feeling criticized, denim caused self-loathing and handling a particular type of sandpaper felt like she had told a white lie. In tracking her responses to the same textiles over the course of a few months they found that her feelings were the same, however she expressed them differently. Sumaranian (2021) references that Brang and Ramachandran noted "how real and visceral her emotions were in response to touch" (p. 51). These sensations, coupled with the physical effect exhibited in AW's expressions, heart rate and skin confirmed that she was indeed experiencing the textures in this particular way. AW explained how she had experienced this "sensory overload" (p. 53) since childhood and how difficult it was to navigate the world when everything she brushed up against triggered her emotions. Her challenge continues to be one of recognizing the difference between emotions that are important and ones that are brought on by touching the wrong thing. Although very few people are recorded with this type of condition, many of us have haptic preferences and find metaphors, memory and meaning in the fabrics we handle (Submaranian, 2021).

We can consider a form of synesthesia within the intermodal theories of expressive arts therapy, in that our involvement with an art form allows for feelings to be experienced in a multisensorial way. We often use a synesthesia language that engages us with the senses, such as being 'moved' by a painting or 'touched' by a performance. Similarly, incorporating a movement, sound, words or action intermodally with an art form, such as a visual image, may

permit a deeper expression of how we sense, perceive and understand to emerge (Knill et al., 2004).

Mesh: Security and Attachment

The child's need for attachment in the developmental stage of life was explored in Harry Harlow's controversial experiment with monkeys in 1959. These monkeys were reared using a mother substitute constructed of a wire frame covered with sponge and terry cloth versus a simple wired framed mother version. His research focused on whether the monkeys' attachment to a wire frame that supplied milk, was preferable over the soft 'mother' that did not supply milk and found that the data leaned toward the latter. The results revealed the importance of attachment through bodily contact between the infant and mother (Harlow, 1958).
This may well have influenced John Bowlby and his developing theories, (Van der Horst et al., 2008) since his working model looked at the importance of contact with and comfort from the parent or caregiver as the attachment figure, and the effect on the infants' physiological development. Along with Mary Ainsworth's 'strange situation assessment' his research demonstrated that love from a secure base of attachment was vital to our understanding of how relationships work and that contact through touch was necessary for our nervous system development (Bowlby, 2014 and Allen, 1995).

As I read about Harlow's theories on attachment, a profound realization occurs to me, as the veil is pulled back revealing my own meta experience within his research. Ironically, I see the two wire framed monkeys as a representation of my nan and my mother, with one providing the

physical connection and soothing that helped me form a secure attachment bond and the other fulfilling my physiological needs.

In my formative years we lived together in my Nan's house. My mother immediately found full-time work as an accountant and was gone most of the time, leaving me predominantly in the care of my nan, nourished with her warm and loving nature and her creative and playful environment. In my early teens, my nan moved to another part of the country requiring a 3-4 hour journey to visit her which I did on a regular basis. Regardless of the distance, I still chose the warmth and comfort of my Nan over the cold severe nature of my mother. I metaphorically chose the fabric covered surrogate monkey over the wire framed one; this knowledge leaves me with a sense of sadness over the lack of connection with my mother. In hindsight, textiles have woven themselves throughout my life, leaving me with the lovely thought that although my Nan passed away long ago, she still speaks to me through the language of fabric.

Seamless: Memory/Emotion

'Mnemonic' relates to anything that assists in bringing our memories to the surface. The term 'haptic' is a derivation of the Greek, haptesthai, meaning 'to touch.' The mnemonic quality of textiles is significant in that our memories can be ushered to us by a haptic conversation between our skin and the layers of fabric. The language of fabric is a method of expression, not just in its made form as clothing but also in its fundamental form as cloth. It is the rich, durable structure of interwoven fibres that holds the space where, as Dormor (2020) suggests, the "past, present and future can reside and regenerate" (p. 8). It serves as an agent that can bring forth emotions and a sense of connection that is both physical and metaphysical.

Lamb (2019) describes:

> As I handle cloth my mind seems to switch to a more sensory and emotional way of thinking. The texture, drape, handle of the cloth, the way it sounds and smells, how light is reflected or absorbed, these are all important aspects of the way it seduces or repels us. (p. 6)

It has a living human quality to it, an immediacy, the fabric doesn't wait for you, the dialogue is instant and known, one we converse with on a daily basis. There is an intimacy in that it touches or is worn close to the body and it is this relationship with our skin that elevates it as a conduit to our memories and emotions (Dolan, 2015). Odabasi (2023) reflects on the hidden potential of textiles: "Clothes are not only stored in the memory as visual expressions but also reflected by the sounds they produce, the odors they emit, and their corporeal sensations" (p. 415). It is this fully sensorial condition that allows for our historical tapestry to reside within its fibres. Textile material is an archive, one that bears the human imprint through the wear, tear, sweat and stains of daily life (Hunt, 2014).

In *The Fabric of Linen: Linen and Life Cycle in England 1678-1810*, Dolan (2015) brings forth the Derwentwater Sheet as a historical example. It was removed from the Tower of London following the execution of Sir James Radclyffe for treason and was embroidered, possibly at a later date, by his wife Ann using a combination of their hair as thread. This sheet, that was used by both Radclyffe and his wife in his final days, is certainly an indication of their love, perhaps even providing solace to Ann that by touching it she can remember him and keep his memory alive (Dolan, 2015).

Ultimately, touch has the power to keep us connected to the memory of family members and loved ones. Handling fabric or clothing that has been in contact with the body affords transference of an emotional bond, one that can be experienced by both the maker and owner. Dolan and Holloway (2016) also suggests that “the ability of clothing to retain the shape of previous owners, can evoke the physical presence of long dead bodies” (p. 155).

My Nan’s leopard print coat carries an emotional charge, as I remember her wearing it and love how her shape has shifted its original drape. I imagine her movement in the folds of the sleeves and her hands pushed into the now sagging pockets. Her story of fun and aliveness I am careful to preserve, so it stays in my closet, where I see it every day and it makes me smile. Pajackowska suggests that “cloth and textile invoke the ‘haptic’ gaze; that is a gaze which carries the sensation and meaning of wanting to touch or be touched” (p. 148). The emotional connection to my Nan’s coat will dilute with each generation as I am aware that it will end with me. For my children it is simply an heirloom, one that will have a new and very different life after mine.

The emotional potency of fabric and thread of connection is highlighted during a 2013 conference on Emotional Objects, where Professor John Styles focused on The London Foundling Hospital Tokens used from 1741-1760. Styles discussed the use of fabric tokens as identification tags during the 18th Century at England’s first orphanage for abandoned children which revealed textile scraps laced with emotions. Mothers facing hardships had little option but to drop their babies off with the hopes that they would be afforded a better life. The mothers remained anonymous, and the child was given a new identity, however as great value was placed on the bond between mother and child, a system was devised in case they found themselves in the position to reclaim their children at a later date.

As many mothers were illiterate at this time, they left small objects or pieces of fabric as an identifying marker. Some of these tokens were provided by whomever left the child, while others were cut from blankets or clothing that they were found in. The emotional connection between parents and the child was imbued in the swatches, imprinted with the hands that washed or made it and the smell and touch of the body it clothed or wrapped (Style, 2013). As described by Jones and Stallybrass (2000) “The threads she spins will cover the body of the child, shape it and be internalized as tactile memory and social form” (p. 116). Unfortunately only a few children were reclaimed, leaving these highly emotional fabrics as an embodied link to a painful memory (Style, 2013).

With the recent passing of my mother, I was given a small package with a note pinned to the outside. Inside was an exquisite yellow knitted dress of the most intricate stitching which she had knitted when she was expecting her first child. Not knowing what the sex would be, she made it for a Nik or a Nicola. When my brother Nik arrived, she packed it away, but it was eventually worn by me when I arrived less than 2 years later. There are photos of me in it as a baby, but only now as I hold it can I visualize a mother I never knew. I imagine my mum, pregnant for the first time and far from home. I can feel all the love she put into the delicate pattern, perhaps the wool running through her fingers as she worked bilaterally with the needles helping her to feel calm and soothed during an anxious time. In her article, Pajaczkowska (2007) puts forward that the “rhythmic repetition of the simple actions absorbs the free, floating anxiety and allows the knitters mind to roam freely across the landscapes of thought” (p. 143).

As far as I know this was the only thing she knitted, as the mother I knew disliked touch, was practical rather than emotional and filled her life with words and numbers, journaling, and accounting. Dolan (2015) notes how the “power of touch, can create and retrieve emotional

meaning" (p. 242). This mnemonic dress transports me and, when I hold it close, fills me with warmth and compassion. The haptics led me to an untold story, through feel and feeling embedded in the wool.

Figure 4: Knitted dress

As this thesis unfolds, I am looking at new ways to stay connected to deceased family members. The garments I've held onto will be brought together, reshaped as pennants, attached as bunting and placed where they can be part of celebrations in life for years to come. At Woven Memories in Australia, Mary Burgess, the owner and a hand weaver, aims to keep memories alive by "keeping the thread going, literally and metaphorically." By weaving threads from the cloth or clothing of deceased loved ones, a new textile emerges, transforming grief and loss into an emotional object that can comfort and soothe. " Relationships are re-worked, and some kind of tangible creation materializes that weaves together the past and future."

> 'Can you read it? Do you understand? By squares, by inches, you are drawn in. Your fingers read it like Braille.

History, their days, the quick deft fingers. Their lives recorded in cloth.

A universe here, stitched to perfection. You must be the child-witness,

You are the only survivor.'

(Oates, 2023, p. 52)

The mnemonic capacity of textiles incorporates our senses and creates a relationship to the past, present and future while permitting access to the story behind its production. Odabsai (2022) notes, "A wide variety of memories and stories about humanity are waiting to be revealed and textiles activate stories that already exist in people" (p. 420).

Quilts are a textile record from the past that hold a passage in time in their making. They are often passed down through the generations and provide physical warmth and comfort while also imparting insight into a cultural history (Odabasi, 2022). Some quilts were made from old clothing, as a way to repurpose the textiles and provide a closer connection to the history of the wearer (Garlock, 2016). This inclusion of these recycled fabrics in the textile piece suggests that memories in the cloth can be held physically and symbolically.

Hunt (2014) posits that memories residing in cloth could be looked at from two perspectives. "First, there is the concept of cloth in its everyday use as naturally recording and preserving human imprints, to become a form of memory itself" (p. 216). Secondly, she referenced Tanner's idea of 'inscribing practices' in memory and argues that cloth lends itself as a receptive surface for such deliberate inscriptions (Hunt, 2014). The sheet that James Radclyffe, the third Earl of Derwentwater laid upon prior to his execution for treason in 1716, can be considered as potent with memory. His grieving wife held onto it as a reminder of his bodily imprint and inscribed her love for him into the cloth. Rather than embroidering with linen thread,

she used human hair, possibly both James and hers, to symbolically entwine their love into the fibers (Davis, 2022).

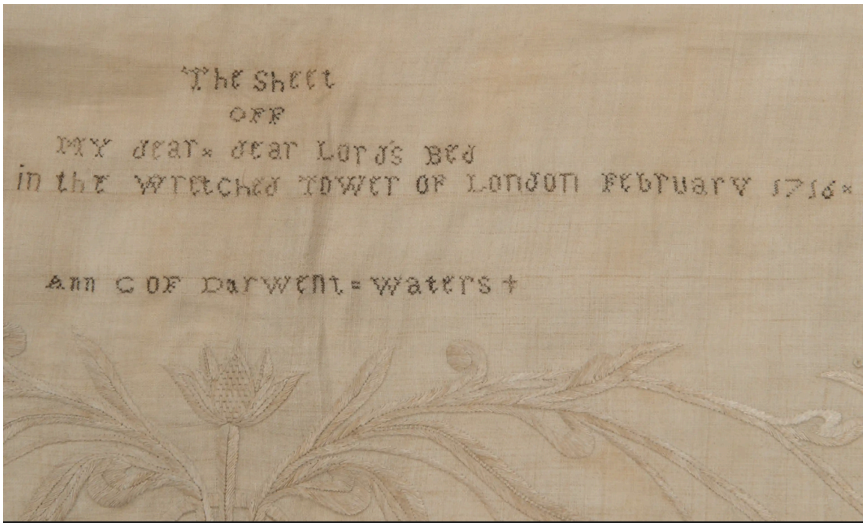

Figure 5: 'The sheet off my dear dear lord's bed in the wretched Tower of London'- Derwentwater water sheet detail. Photograph: Museum of London

Renaissance women often used embroidery as a creative outlet but also as a form of recording their lived experience in the world. Jones and Stallybrass (2000), describe how the women "plied the needle to materialize their views of the world and to be remembered as makers of objects that commemorated themselves, their families and their country's triumphs" (p.170). The textiles created give us access to important historical chapters from a phenomenological perspective, but perhaps also highlights that this activity had therapeutic properties.

Regenerate: Textile Therapy

In her book *Using Textile Arts and handcrafts in Therapy with Women*, Collier (2012) notes the lack of studies that delve into the use of textiles in Art Therapy, which led to her

extensive research into how and why women used textiles arts and the therapeutic benefits they received in the process. Since then, we have more data to suggest that working with fibres and textiles promotes healing, however, most of the articles and books reviewed for this thesis lent more towards project-oriented work. Collier's data was gathered from almost 900 women and it revealed that when they engaged in fiber and textiles arts such as knitting, weaving, crocheting, sewing, quilting and felting, they found that the activity had the overwhelming ability to alter their mood state and provide coping strategies. In her survey, Collier (2012) found that "the most common fiber art techniques used by textile-copers when they were are upset are: knitting or crocheting (37.1%); weaving (22.4%); and spinning (16.7%)" (p. 52) and furthered that "in women who make textiles, the mood enhancing effects of textile coping was far more successful than for other types of coping" (p. 53). Women who were experienced and skilled, described textile making as being an important creative outlet, one that they found rejuvenating and invigorating. Many of those surveyed described how the activities helped them feel grounded, intellectually stimulated, gave them an outlet to cope with illness or disability and provided a social connection. These benefits outweighed or lasted longer those they had experienced from walking or other social activities (Collier, 2012).

Francis Reynolds (2000) qualitative study with 39 women looked at how needlecraft such as embroidery or tapestry could help manage depression with symptoms that included lack of motivation, poor self-esteem and low moods. By engaging in this textile activity, they found that the focus needed for the work provided a welcome distraction from worry and stress which gave them a sense of control and empowerment. Reynolds (2000) puts forth that "women managing depression focused more frequently on the relaxation benefits of needlecraft…as most were

seeking ways of managing stress reactions, commonly associated with difficult life events" (p. 18).

During the 16th century, Mary Queen of Scots and her companion Bess of Hardwicke used needlework as a pastime during her fifteen years of captivity in England (Jones and Stallybrass, 2000). One could surmise that this creative stimulation coupled with the focussed hand eye coordination of the delicate stitchwork, heightened their mental acuity which more than likely kept the oppressive nature of depression at bay. Through the sewing of their initials into the needlework, their identities transcended their incarceration and secured their rightful place in history (Jones and Stallybrass, 2000).

Research that supports the therapeutic benefits of handicrafts employed by women, revealed that knitting and crocheting were at the top of the list when it came to an activity that could shift negative feelings to more positive ones (Collier, 2012).

In the 'Stitch Away Stress' interview on YouTube, Dr Perri Klass described how, as a medical student, she found that knitting during lectures helped her to feel more relaxed and focus better (Klass, 2018). There is a bilateral tactile stimulation in working with the needles and yarn, an alternating movement that is a form of EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) that is used as a method to treat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Amano and Tochi, 2016). Klass notes that not only is there the mental discipline of following a pattern, knitting also brings colour and texture into her life (2018).

Quilting is a process of piecing and sewing two layers of fabric with a soft layer such as wool or batting sandwiched in between. This decorative cloth is often used as a warm bed covering or for clothing. Originally derived from the Latin word *culcita,*which means mattress, the word *quilt* has now progressed from something to lie on, into a cover to lie under. The

expression “run for cover” as in running for a place of protection, highlights the secure emotions associated with this tangible object.

Collier (2012) tells us that

> One author, Janet Berlo (2001), used quilting to cope with depression. She suggested that quilting provided her with a shelter, a comfort as if under a big quilt and surrounded by swathes of fabric. Berlo stated: “when I wasn’t quilting, I wasn’t alive. On most days, I felt that I literally needed those vibrant hues in order to breathe. My body craved the colours and the kinetic act of cutting and piecing, cutting and piecing” (p.28).

When Elliott was 2 months old, hospital tests showed some damage to his brain which meant there was a high probability that he had Cerebral Palsy. I had no idea if he would ever walk, talk or speak and if he did, to what degree. As he grew, it was evident that his muscle tone was weak which affected his speech and the left side of his body but did nothing to dampen his warrior spirit. It is not uncommon to feel helpless as a parent when you are reliant on a constant stream of physical and mental health practitioners to help your disabled child. As I adjusted to a new normal, I found a place for my particular skill set of art and textiles, a language that Elliott could use to express his feelings and frustrations when words failed him.

My ever-present fabric basket and safety pins and velcro meant that Elliott and his older brother could engage in imaginative safe play, simply adding or changing a fabric to change the scenario of the story. A consistent theme that emerged was of Elliott as a strong, helpful superhero, a character that I came to realize was his version of an able-bodied person.

Costumes helped his self-esteem, he explored identities, learned to problem solve and found social connections. The character choices he made were laced with symbolism, which gave me insight into his needs and wants and taught me how to adapt accordingly.

Frances Reynolds has conducted a number of studies on the effects of fibre and textile work on helping with depression and chronic illness. In her 1997 study of needlework practitioners who all had a chronic illness or disability, she found that the textile activity tapped into their need for an 'able' identity which informed their sense of self (Reynolds, 2002), something I had also identified in my son.

Chronic illness challenges the ability to cope with everyday life; it can have a crippling effect on a person due to a loss of identity, self-esteem, a lack of control, uncertainty of life and a dependency on others. Emotions associated with these challenges can be difficult to process verbally; whereas engaging in the fibre and textile arts can provide a safe haven for symbolic feelings to reside. Over half the women Reynolds interviewed, recognised that they had incorporated symbolisms in their textile work that helped them cope with their illness. Through use of colour, images and style they identified themes such as suffering, feelings about their experience with the illness and how they mastered the effects of the illness/treatment.
A large number viewed their creative outlet as a relaxing distraction and escape from the anxiety of their illness, while others felt empowered by mastering a skill that could increase feelings of control (Reynolds, 2002).

Sarah Potter's (2019) survey with art therapists was used to illustrate their experiences with textiles in both their personal and clinical work. Her research consisted of collecting data from 76 participants and feedback from four women in a focus group. Approximately half of those taking part stated that mindfulness and an improved positive mood were the main benefits

for using textiles in both their personal and professional work. Potter (2019) argues that “the textural qualities of the material may impact why it functions so successfully as a mindfulness tool” (p. 68). There is certainly a soothing and grounding sensation that occurs when we engage with the materials manually, this helps the nervous system to calm, and supports healing for both clinician and patient. Those that used knitting or weaving as a personal activity found it helped them slow down and relax, while counting stitches, breathing, and mistake making were all important parts of the mindfulness they experienced.

A high percentage of those surveyed also listed ‘aesthetic pleasure’ as one of the personal benefits of working with textiles, while a few noted it provided them with a tactile engagement, helped them with emotional regulation, and gave them the ability to cope with anxiety. (Potter, 2019). Collier (2012) posits that “the reason women are so drawn to textile work is that they love the aesthetic quality of textiles. It is also grounding, psychologically and socially fulfilling, and helps women to have tangible outcomes to their lives" (p. 35). Of the different activities the clinicians employed, the most utilized were sewing and beadwork, while a small but significant number recorded using fabric in other ways. Some clients collaged with textiles, while others used fabric as sensory stimulation or to symbolize parts of themself, this indicated that not all art therapists used textiles in a project-oriented capacity, and acknowledged that fabric could facilitate a freer exploration and expression of feelings.

Potter’s (2019) survey illustrates that when asked to select perceived benefits of using textiles in their clinical work, “34 participants selected ‘Engaging in mindfulness,’ 31 participants selected ‘Improve positive mood’... 17 participants selected “other,” which included emotional regulation, bilateral brain stimulation and behavioral tools for clients with adhd” (p. 50). They also noted that clients found working with textiles was emotionally stimulating. They

were able to slow down, become more patient and feel grounded and centered. The tactile experience of softness helped with self-regulation and reduced anxiety, while also providing a tangible transitional object to take from the sessions.

Discussions within the focus group revealed that the main obstacle for not using textiles in a clinical setting was time. Potter (2019) puts forth that 29 participants selected "Time needed to create was seen to be the biggest challenge for both personal and clinical textile art making in the survey responses" (p. 65). The art therapists found that although activities of these types were certainly beneficial in both their personal and professional lives, time was needed for their clients to learn the skill and the work could not necessarily be completed within a session. Some also found textiles were not a viable art modality from a cost and portability perspective.

In their clinical work, the art therapists stated that the majority of their clients using textile arts were females between the ages of 5-17 years, which led Potter to query whether the textile arts were more suitable for that demographic or whether they had not been fully explored when working with adults (Potter, 2019).

Like Collier (2012) and Potter (2019), Hamilton (2017), also mentioned the limited number of written works on the use of textiles as a therapeutic tool. In her research, she used an expressive arts therapy lens to investigate the use of textiles as a form of self-expression and specifically children's response to playing with this medium. She explored how using textiles as an art modality fitted into the low skill/ high sensitivity format of expressive arts therapy, while also providing a hands-on, sensory-based approach for the clients.

Her data was gathered from an exploration into the benefits of incorporating textile activities - predominantly weaving and felting,during sessions with home-schooled children of different ages. The activities she introduced required the children to slow down and work

rhythmically which helped them to be more focused. Hamilton (2017) reflects on one of the children involved, “the physical and tactile act of weaving the threads up and down allowed her to stay present with the work and keep focused on the task” (p. 75). The higher levels of concentration required with these types of activities affected the children differently; some became quiet while they played, while others opened up as they gained more confidence with the project. Certainly, the inclusion of this modality in expressive arts sessions proved to be fun and relaxing for the children involved, but also of importance is that they were able to problem solve and master a new skill, one that, at times, caused them all a level of frustration (Hamilton, 2017).

It seems reasonable to surmise that regardless of the therapeutic advances of textile arts in the clinical setting, there are difficulties that arise that may lessen its inclusion. Mastering a technique, no matter how basic, can lead to frustration and the time required to adequately come to completion within a session can be challenging.

Potter’s (2019) data included a high number of participants who reported using textiles in an unstructured way and the importance of free exploration of fabrics with their clients. One member of the focus group illustrated “I think it gives them a real strong sense of efficacy to be able to manipulate these materials and learn on their own” (p. 70). Fifteen of the participants reported using textiles in other ways such as sensory stimulation and exploration, using fabric swatches as symbolism of self, for collaging and as part of found objects. Although this type of art-making had not originally been considered by the researcher in their collecting of data, the feedback suggested that textile arts without specific techniques were being employed for therapeutic exploration and play and deserved further attention (Potter, 2019).

Yield: Fabric as an Art Form

Myriad artists utilize textiles in their work. The versatility lends itself beautifully, as Thoma (2023) illustrates, to "its malleability and performative potential" (p. 365). Textiles can be scrunched, stretched, layered, shredded, pleated, ruched, molded, wrapped, deconstructed, or reconstructed. They can absorb substances such as dyes, paint, plaster, wax and water and can be pierced with needles, stapled, slashed and entwined. And they have the ability to float with the lightness of a breath and keep grounded with volume and weight. Coupled with these unique properties, working with fibers and fabrics provides a sensory integration that is both calming and pleasurable. Here in the act of the making of the piece lies a therapeutic quality that is part of the play (Odabasi, 2023).

The textile artists that Collier interviewed in her research study, had little interest in whether the pieces they created had functionality. Rather, they focused more on the emergent metaphors and symbolism that related to their concerns and ideals. (Collier, 2012). It was their evolving work that held resonance. Regardless of how we interact with textile activities, research suggests that they afford an enormous amount of healing for a wide range of demographics. For some there is a need for structure, that comes with following a pattern, gleaning from our traditions and cultures and with the expectation of a certain outcome, for others there is a rejuvenation and freedom that comes with the creativity and experimentation of the medium (Collier, 2012). Both artists and women making textile crafts, as Collier (2012) notes, "indicated that the materials frequently 'spoke 'to them about what to make … and they spent time connecting with their fibers before beginning a project" (p. 229). Here, play and experimentation

with colours and textures and shaping can be an inroad for transformation, or as beautifully put by Collier (2012) “the process can be a journey to embrace” (p. 97).

Woven: A Cultural Language

As discussed, fabric is a known cross-cultural language, one that is experienced as a form of second skin from birth until death. As Ayling-Smith (2023) illustrates, “Our familiarity with cloth in everyday life means that we have a vocabulary not only of words but also of experience in the sensation of seeing, touching, handling and encountering it” (p. 408). This corporeal relationship permits memories, metaphor and meaning to thread through the fibres while holding space for emotions to emerge. By staying on the surface, we encounter an art modality that is essentially pulling double duty, creating an inner and outer dialogue as it soothes and calms while also offering up avenues for play and exploration. It conveys a nonverbal language. It has a dialect thick with meaning and uses colour, texture and malleability for textile shape shifting and expression.

As a therapeutic modality, fabric is probably the most accessible, as all cultures have some relationship to textiles. By using a known medium, the connection can be immediate, intimate, and less threatening to work with, especially in cultures where materials such as paints and pastels are less available. Lisa Raye Garlock (2016), describes how she found traditional western materials were neither affordable or sustainable for the schools and women’s shelters she facilitated in India. “Fabric was readily available, and women in particular responded to textiles with excitement, knowledge and pleasure” (p. 60). It becomes apparent that accessibility and the wide-ranging capabilities of this medium affords a positive mental and physical impact on us

regardless of age, gender and stage of development (Garlock, 2016; Potter, 2019; Ayling-Smith, 2023).

Literature by Garlock (2016), Hania (2017), Dabbous (2022) and Odabasi (2023), revealed how working with fabric and textiles can help refugees and survivors of trauma express their emotions, break through language barriers, and bring forth new narratives. In my own qualitative research with refugee children and youth in Surrey schools, I highlight how this medium can adapt well into group therapy sessions.

In the last decade there has been an increase in the number of refugees entering Canada. In her research paper, Alexandra Hania, proposed that art therapy, especially embroidery textile work, could help reduce symptoms of trauma for Syrian refugee women (Hania, 2017). The journey to safety for the families is arduous, often moving from country to country or finding placement in camps all while facing the fragility of life for themselves and their families. Parents and children had experienced loss, trauma and displacement and struggled to cope with symptoms of PTSD, anxiety and depression in a new country with a different culture and unknown language. Working with refugees in a therapeutic capacity requires a sensitivity to their story, family, culture and religion, and by keeping fabric and textiles at the forefront in the work, can positively impact their mental health.

Historically, Syrian women use embroidery in their culture to create narrative art; in introducing this as a therapeutic tool, the medium is familiar and therefore comforting and one they can master; it provides them with a language to express their emotions, that has less limitations than traditional talk therapy. The symbolism in their work chronicles their experiences and by working them into the cloth in a safe space has a positive impact on reducing symptoms of trauma (Hania, 2017).

In his 2022 research paper, Sanem Odabasi investigated the potential of textiles to reveal and heal trauma. He references the word ‘text’ as residing within textile, and how, when working with this medium, the narrative comes to life in a material form (2022). The connection is similar to the one we have with language and therefore provides a conduit through which to share stories and express emotions. As Odabasi illustrates “the combination of various narratives and production methods that utilize different textile materials … conveys traumatic memories that could not be expressed verbally” (p. 412). There is a slowness in the making of the visual piece, which allows for deep emotions to be processed in their own time. The interaction is tactile, hands are in constant contact with the fabric as they shape, manipulate and control the narrative (Potter, 2019). The activity of sewing and embroidery produces a rhythmic movement between the thumb and the forefinger, where the needle passes in and out of the cloth, softly pulling cords of colour in a manner that is both calming and meditative. When Odabasi (2022) notes “the needle pierces the fabric, it forces creation onto the threads,” we find that the needlework affords healing in the making of the piece, there is a creation of something permanent, a place where their identity and story can lie in an indelible way (p. 414). Bringing textile work into group therapy can act as a bridge to their homeland, where they can share similar experiences, build social connections and have a sense of community (Hania, 2017). In sewing together, the women are encouraged to share their stories, their traumatic narratives are witnessed and affirmed, and they are able to support each other, all of which can be an integral part of the healing process (Odabasi, 2022).

In 2016, her article on story cloths or *arpillera,* Lisa Raye Garlock presented how this relevant, textile activity could provide therapeutic support to survivors of trauma. By depicting their stories in cloth, they found a creative outlet to process, cope and safely give a voice to

unspeakable events they had witnessed and experienced. The cloth became a holder for their emotions, where through the imagery, feelings such as anger, sorrow, joy and pain could emerge. Garlock (2016), tells us that "making these story cloths enabled the women to remember loved ones who had died and process trauma in a safe way; it also connected them with others who had likewise experienced trauma and injustice" (p. 60). Women throughout history have worked with textiles as a form of expression, for survivors of trauma, sewing together and sharing their stories provided them with a sense of community, where their experiences resonated with each other and feelings of isolation, fear and shame could be replaced by connection, support and validation (Garlock, 2016).

Also apparent in the creative process of making a story cloth, is that the handling of fibers and textiles imparts a nurturing and soothing sensory pleasure, while the cutting, sewing or crocheting of the borders produce a calming repetitive action. Sewing the story cloth requires both hands being used simultaneously and this adds a form of bilateral stimulation which has proved beneficial to many suffering from the effects of PTSD (Garlock, 2016). The finished piece stands as both a visual and tactile testament to their struggle and resilience.

In her article in the *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice* (2022), Yasmine Dabbous noted that much of the literature on the healing nature of textiles arts, is process orientated. Here, she asked the question that I have also been focused on for many years: "What happens as fabric is managed and how does it regulate emotions?" (p. 121). Dabbous runs an art and design studio in Beirut, Lebanon, a country that continues to struggle with its past. Dabbous (2022) highlights that the effects of the economic crash in 2019 and the devastating explosion at the post of Beirut in 2020, "triggered difficult unresolved war memories" (p. 123).

At her studio, she explored whether there was a potential for healing on the surface of the textile arts and conducted a case study with students of all ages who had collectively experienced past traumas and had little to no experience with fiber arts. She discovered that conceptual design choices such as background, colour and stitches, whether chosen mindfully or subconsciously, all played a part in the psychological healing of trauma. Dabbous concludes that “textile work offers many opportunities to sublimate negative emotions, propose solutions on fabric, exteriorize feelings of anger and resentment, protect oneself metaphorically or return to colorful childhood memories and play,” regardless of one's skill or experience with fiber arts (Dobbous, 2022, p. 136).

A Shift

I was familiar with therapy, having experienced it as a teen and during the breakdown of my marriage. Both encounters were with psychiatrists as the only affordable and available option, yet my regular visits to the austere office, where I engaged in talk therapy, left me feeling disconnected and alone.

Enrolling into the world of expressive arts therapy created a radical shift for me, one that was both exciting and daunting. Returning to education as an older student highlighted my insecurities, yet every step of the way I felt more alive than I could remember and welcomed the journey back to self. It provided me with a multisensory mind-body connection to process a range of conditions and issues including trauma. This different approach gave me a supportive understanding of how trauma is held in the implicit memories of the body and provided a path for self-discovery and healing.

The art modalities such as drawing, painting, movement and clay, allowed for exploration through imagination and play, fabric was available, but generally only as costuming for creating characters in drama therapy and clowning classes. I learned to let go of control, show up authentically and focus on what emerged within the process as opposed to the final product. I was comfortable being immersed in the arts, having used them in a professional capacity for most of my adult life, but this was completely different, with an open heart and mind, that was tinged with apprehension, I was unsure of what to expect but excited for what could unfold.

Expressive Arts Therapy

The client comes to therapy due to their life feeling overwhelming, threadbare, unraveled or in a helpless state, they enter a space with the therapist where they can take a break or pause from their everyday life and with guidance, use the arts to process their experiences and gain insight and meaning (Knill et al., 2005).

The *client-centered* or *person-centered approach* developed by Carl Rogers is a philosophy that I resonate with in the therapeutic relationship. It underlines that if the therapist is open, authentic, empathic and genuinely understanding, then the client feels heard and accepted which promotes the opportunity for change and growth (Rogers, 1993). As I listen to the client, I am aware of their gestures, mannerisms, posture or tone of voice, which add to my understanding of their lived experience. Halprin (2003) furthers this and considers that "central to the therapeutic process is an understanding of struggle as an opportunity for creative confrontation and change" (p. 47). If the therapist can refrain from the desire to help and fix the situation, the

client can potentially experience both a breaking down and self-discovery on the path to healing and growth (Knill et al., 2005).

Expressive arts therapy recognizes that each person's suffering is unique to them and incorporates a range of different art modalities such as painting, drama, dance, sculpture, music or poetry, that allows for sensitivity and flexibility to their individual needs. The invitation to enter the transitional space and immerse in the arts can provide the client with an active break from their issue and the opportunity to gain a new perspective. For some, the journey into the arts may be slow and trepidacious, but with support from the therapist, and the availability of materials that require little skill to master, the client can use the arts, imagination and play to express internal emotions that may otherwise be difficult to express externally. The work is both verbal and non verbal and resides within a framework or architecture that allows for play and experimentation and where metaphors and meaning can surface and be examined by both the client and therapist.

The Architecture of a Session

Filling In

The initial phase of the session is the filling in stage. It is here that information about the client's situation is gathered. The therapist asks open-ended questions with curiosity and the client uses concrete language to talk about the problem. Knill & Eberhart (2023) guides us to "accept the client as the expert for their own life" (p. 43). They have their own unique lived experiences and know what is of importance and significance.

Whether in a school, office, or a private practice, I created a space for this stage that was separate from the arts space. I used a couch with different textured cushions, and blankets, or

placed soft rugs on the floor with a circle of fabric if needed. The provision of textiles in the space, gives the client a physical and tactile support, the cushion may act to bolster this moment of sharing their lived experience while also creating a bridge into the decentering part of the session. One participant in the research group C described that using a piece of fabric to identify how she was feeling in the moment, was an engaging sensory process.

Knill et al. (2005), echoes Winnicott's view on the therapeutic practice that “the therapist or analyst must develop a holding pattern, in which the patient feels free to be themselves without restraint” (p. 50). I invite the client to choose where to sit and the distance they would like me to sit from them. When life feels chaotic, this choice can be a small step to feeling in control.

When working with groups, the ‘filling in’ stage will differ, and it is important to be sensitive to the needs of the individual while holding the space. Here I may introduce a fun warm-up or check-in such as saying your name with a movement that the group copies, this can be validating while also providing a relaxing cohesive quality. In the spirit of shaping, I may make suggestions such as “Can you expand the movement while saying your name quietly? Can you make your voice louder and the movement small?”

When working with refugees this was an important start to the sessions, as here they could say their name out loud, and witness an aesthetic response from their peers. With young children I have used the rhythmic back and forth tossing of a soft ball while the check in occurs. For groups, the fabric circle gives them a choice of where to sit and acts as a threshold for sharing.

In working with young children in one to one sessions or groups, the background information is often provided up front by the parent or teacher, while the child may offer up more information during the decentering process.

In the safety of the therapeutic setting, if the client feels understood and supported by the therapist, they may let go, break down or allow themselves to fall apart, the space between this experienced chaos and entering the art modality is known as the liminal stage and originates from the word 'limin', Latin for threshold. By entering the "transitional experience" (Winnicott, 1971) or "liminal" place (Turner, 1969), the client is at the threshold between their external and internal world. (Knill et al., 2005). Levine (1992) suggests that "it is essential to human beings to fall apart, to fragment, disintegrate and to experience the despair that comes with lack of wholeness" (p. xvi.) In this almost dream-like state between what has been left behind and what is yet to transpire, lies the potential for creativity, where new meanings both symbolic and metaphorical can emerge (Knill et al., 2005).

Decentering

Knill et al. (2005) describe decentering as "literally a coping experience in a situation of restriction which has the effect of discovering resources" (p. 87). Introducing limitations into an art activity such as painting with the non-dominant hand, or giving a time frame, can help the client stay in the present and gives them some temporary distance from centering on the issue of concern.

As I invite the client to enter this stage, I am always curious about their relationship with the arts, and aim to discover what art modality they are comfortable with, and employ techniques to invite them to connect with the medium. It is important to understand the experience or skill

level of the client as this helps them engage in the play or the creation of the work. When working with refugee students in elementary and high schools, I found it helpful to learn a few words of their language and introduce art mediums that were culturally sensitive. Painting to Arabic music, incorporating traditional dance, experimenting with clay and fabric all facilitated as Knill et al. (2005) suggests, the "need to find culturally relevant manifestations of art which were best suited to the client and to the facilitator in terms of the situation at hand" (p. 97).

The clients' self-critic may cause them to feel 'no good' at art or bring up feelings of anxiety, by inviting the client into the arts in a playful way can help them stay with the process as it unfolds. Creativity does not require a background in the arts, if the client can let go of the outcome and be with the arts the imagination can act as a healer (McNiff, 1992). As a gentle introduction I may introduce a ball of plasticine, piece of fabric or drawing pad and marker for the client to play with or doodle on while they are sharing their issue. This can work as a bridge to move into the artwork or extend into other art mediums in the shaping of the session. The client can voice their emotions through the forming of the art medium, to bring it forth and have it witnessed, to take some breathing space and navigate a way forward.

Low Skill/ High Sensitivity

For children, walking into the arts space comes with a wide-eyed wonderment, an excited desire to explore and play. Some adults are more trepidatious. If they are unfamiliar with the arts mediums, they may feel anxious to use them as a therapeutic tool. I have found that placing different textured cushions on the couch beside the client provides a gentle invitation for them to connect with fabrics. The concept of low skill/high sensitivity—providing art materials that are simplistic in that a skill is not required in their use—can create a significant breakthrough for

adults in the therapeutic space. Knill et al. (2005) explains, “The more sensitized clients are to the step leading to an artistic process, and the more their involvement can counter any indifference that is present, the more the motivation will increase” (p. 99).

I may introduce the client to collage by having them tear the paper. The lack of precision allows for a freedom to exist that may not have been there. Before working with fabric, I will introduce clients to feel the textiles with eyes open and closed and pay attention to memories that surface. With clay, I encourage the client to ‘work’ the clay, to explore it with hands and fingers, squeeze, push, twist it and throw it down. Of all the art modalities offered to adult clients, I noticed that fabric required the least motivation for engagement. It has a tactile pull whether it is used by itself or intermodally, and produces the least anxiety when offered into the decentering space.

Poiesis

Poiesis originates in the Greek word for making, specifically with art, but it also refers to bringing something original both to oneself and into the world. In the therapeutic setting we recognise that the imaginative activity of art making has the capacity for healing.Poesis occurs when we allow the form to emerge from the art modality such as painting, sculpture, drama, dance, music or poetry by letting go of expectations or predictions of how the finished piece should be. Letting go of control can be challenging but if the client is able to trust the process and allow for the form to emerge, then they can find a new awareness on their path to healing. Levine (2005) suggests that it emerges out of a journey from chaos and furthers that “the work shows us who we are, for we are ourselves knowable yet unfathomable” (p.39).

Halprin (2003) illustrates:

> The art, as a piece of work and as a creative process, holds the energy and the material of the conflict so that we can consciously "look at it," "dialogue with it," and "transform it" in ways that are constructive, illuminating and life-affirming. (p. 39)

The work that the client creates is witnessed with a genuine curiosity. By staying open to what is emerging, I may intervene aesthetically by suggesting bringing another art modality into the work to help expand the range or experience of play. The two dimensional image they might draw can be reimagined in fabric pieces and brought into a tactile three dimensional sculpture. There is a subconscious dialogue with the textiles, "Move me, pick another colour, does this texture work?" that allows the poiesis to be manipulated and explored, reshaped and reimagined.

Aesthetic Response

Within the framework of expressive arts therapy, there is a response that comes from an authentic interest toward the art form that emerges. The reflection, by both the client and therapist, is called aesthetic analysis and attempts to avoid interpretation by staying on the surface of the work. The client looks at what worked or was difficult, how the practice unfolded and whether there were any surprises. Together the art piece, the process and the experience of the making are explored as a path to self-discovery of potential meanings in the work.
The response might conclude with giving the piece a title.

Harvesting

There is a collecting or harvesting of the work at the end of a session that allows for reflection and resourcing before the client returns to their real life. The therapist asks them to

consider if anything from the aesthetic analysis relates to where they were at the start of the session. This is not always immediately evident. The image that emerged may have a message for the client or they may find meaning by reflecting on the piece at a later date (Knill et al., 2005).

If they have been working with fabric, I offer them a piece of the textiles to take with them. This can be used as a transitional object, a resource to help them feel grounded and calm when they have difficulty coping or be integrated into a new piece as homework. One of the women in research group C shared her experience of the importance of these swatches of fabric.

> "I still have them as tangible reminders of the work we did, and use them from time to time to help me reconnect with the valuable conclusions they drew for me in our sessions. Just like how one might hang up a painting or drawing as a visual reminder of a significant part of their therapeutic journey, these fabric pieces can also engage the sense of touch to help me reconnect with these discoveries." (JS, personal communication, February 2, 2024).

Methodology

My lived experience with textiles as cloth and as a conduit for metaphor and meaning led me to expressive arts therapy and opened my eyes to the benefits of fabric to support healing in others. As Dormor (2020) suggests, "A phenomenological approach enables thinking from and through a lived, concrete experience. It is a position which foregrounds modes of knowing derived firstly through the body and the senses" (p. 5). It was from this heuristic position that I included textiles as an art modality into my work with both children and adults to gain a deeper understanding of our dialogue with fabric and its unique capabilities.

Experiential Qualitative Arts-Based Research

Experiential research is on-going and can encompass all stages of life. The learning is achieved by our doing and requires an adaptive quality, one which creates openings for new ideas to surface. In John Heron's (1981) paper on experiential research, he argues that the *"*subjects of the research contribute not only to the content of the research, ie: the activity that is being researched, but also to the creative thinking that generates, manages, and draws conclusions from the research" (p. 1). We gain experiential knowledge through our familiarity with the entity in front of us, whether through a visual encounter or an interaction (Heron, 1981). My understanding of fabric and its unique properties coupled with an ongoing understanding of the various demographics I researched, facilitated an empirical form of enquiry into the area of study.

Qualitative research was incorporated into clinical research in the 1970's and 80's to expand the gathering of data by using a different structure to the interview process. It is based on the study of phenomena and as such the information collected requires an in person, and in-depth dialogue to observe the direct experiences of others and hear their perspective on the subject matter (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Rather than relying on logical and statistical methods, the data collected is focused on the ideas, feelings and lived experiences of people and typically incorporates text, audio and video and the arts to gain insight into the field of research (Ugwu et al., 2023). There are numerous approaches to this type of research. In my study, within a framework of expressive arts therapy, I use Phenomenological, Narrative, Autoethnography, Ethnographic and Arts-Based Research.

Autoethnography is a method of self-study and one that I used as my first point of enquiry and as a viable data source. It was challenging in that it was deeply personal and involved a vulnerability and openness to the emotions that arose, but it also allowed me to explore my feelings and experiences as part of the data (Levy, 2009). In his article for *The Qualitative Report*, Jonathan Skinner (2003) describes impressionistic autoethnography as "a blend of inside-out writing with an impressionists' representational style. This writing begins...with embedding the self, before engaging relationally with others" (p. 514).

Ethnography is a type of research that requires being fully engaged with a particular demographic to observe and understand their interactions and behaviors (Ugwu et al., 2023). It was integral to this study as it helped me gain awareness of the participants' lived experiences and influenced how fabric could be used within the sessions. The refugee students I worked with in both elementary and high schools were from El Salvador, Eritrea, Honduras, Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Thailand and in weekly expressive arts sessions, they shared their language, customs and cultures. Through their art and stories, I was privileged and honored to witness their experiences of loss, displacement, hardship, and resilience. By being adaptive and sensitive to their needs, I gained a deeper understanding of their lives and was afforded a glimpse into their hopes, dreams, and longings.

Although I had an in-depth language with fabrics, I was uncertain of how they might be incorporated as an intermodal art form in a therapeutic session. During the process, I learned that an authentic connection enabled me to adapt and integrate the art modalities as needed, which in turn brought fresh perspectives and led to new discoveries.

Arts-based research

Writer Lynn Kapitan (2010) posits that one of the purposes of art-based research is "to provoke, challenge, and illuminate knowledge rather than to confirm or consolidate it" (p. 214). Cole and Knowles (2008) expands, "it can reach diverse audiences using a diverse language to gain insight into the human condition" (p. 59). By using visual imagery in research, we convey information that can induce an emotional and visceral response. This not only provides a unique point of view but one that may be more memorable and reach a wider audience (Weber, 2008 and Leavy, 2009). As Shaun McNiff (2008) describes, "it is a way for both the researcher and the people involved to understand and examine the experience …and can generate important information that often feels more accurate, original and intelligent than conventional methods" (p. 30). The goal of the research is to gain and share knowledge about life and the presence of the arts provides an empirical study that allows for firsthand exploration of the artistic process (McNiff, 2008).

It is not linear in its methodology; it allows for data to be gathered from both the influence and the impact of 'doing' art and permits the authentic self to connect consciously and subconsciously through the senses. Both the researcher and participant gain knowledge of their inner self and themselves in the world, by both art making and observing. (Greenwood, 2019). Stephen K. Levine (2013) writes:

> To engage in improvisation within arts-based research is to not only be responsive to the emergent knowledge that arise. It is also to cultivate an essentially aesthetic attitude, one that can transform the scholarly task of doing research into artmaking. This attitude is profoundly different from the prevailing models for conducting research, based as they are upon a

quest for certainty. (pp. 26-27)

The term ‘data’ does not resonate with my experiential process with arts, although I recognise that it is universally recognized. McNiff (2009) argues that “artistic expressions and process are larger than the idea of data...the term does not necessarily apply to the complexities of “living expressions” (p. 29).

The arts have the ability to evoke an incredible range of emotions. There is a unique aliveness to the experience that is not fixed, but changeable, one that can unfold, reshape and harvest new emotions, perspectives and responses. In Stephen K. Levine’s paper on arts-based research (2004), he puts forth that “the task of our thinking should, therefore, be to capture the aliveness of our being, to follow it until it expresses itself in words” (p. 14).

It was through my lived experience that I recognized that fabric and textiles were both a form of creative expression and held the potential for healing. Expressive arts therapy gave me the skills and the techniques needed to effectively incorporate this art modality into an area of inquiry within my research.

Research

In each of the settings used in my research, I considered both the demographic I worked with and their individual needs, adapting art modalities as necessary to sensitively facilitate the session as emotions and surprises arose. Working with groups and individuals presented their own challenges and required a different framework and navigation, however the arts were consistent in their ability to hold each human experience.

Most of the examples given in this section are not project-oriented, rather the fabric was provided as an accompaniment. The purpose was to observe whether, by staying on the surface, the textile properties could engage the imagination, extend the range of play and lead to a deeper experience for the client. I use both expressive arts session notes and information gathered from questionnaires to demonstrate how this art modality is a rich tapestry that intrinsically weaves sensorial, emotional, symbolic, mnemonic, security, play and imagination within its fibers. Could fabrics be used both independently and intermodally with other art materials? The work that unfolded revealed both surprises and confirmed its diversity.

Research categories

Group A:

Elementary schools in South Vancouver, BC

One-on-one sessions took place weekly during the school year.

Age range 6 to 10 years.

Group B:

Refugee students

Elementary and High schools in Surrey, BC

Group sessions took place weekly during the school year.

Age range 6- 17 years

Group C:

One-to-One sessions with female Expressive Arts Therapy students.

Group D:

A Workshop for parents and carers run through PosAbilities BC - '*an organization that assists persons with developmental disabilities to lead meaningful and healthy lives.'*

I have used italicized initials as identifying markers for some of the participants in my research.

Experiential Data

Adapting to the space

Spare, suitable rooms are scarce in schools, often the availability is a preschool room filled with colourful blocks and toys which can be distracting for the child, or rooms generally used for storage with mountains of chairs and tables pushed to one side. These obstacles informed the need for a clearly outlined space where sessions could begin and end, check-ins could occur, and loose ends tied.

During one-to-one sessions, I was conscious of meeting the child at their level, so we began by sitting together on the floor where I introduced a small furry ball that we passed back and forth. The rhythmic tossing of this soft form was not only playful, but it also presented a gentle gateway to connection, and aided in the 'filling in' stage of the session. At times I would witness a new quality surface as the child shifted from scattered to focused, unsettled to calm. Was this a transitional object easing them into a transitional space?

Along with my art materials (paint, clay, pastels and sand tray), I brought a large basket of coloured and textured fabrics to these sessions. I chose them for their texture, weight, colour,

size, flexibility, and durability. I didn't have a preconceived notion as to how or whether the children would use them, but based on my own experiences I believed their integration could be seamless and illuminating. Knill et al., (2005) put forth that *"*any art discipline, then, because of its connection with the imagination, can evoke, and find further expression in, any other modality imaginable" (p.121).

Group A:

JC sat on the carpet next to me, and with eyes closed, he breathed slowly, scanning his body for sensations. He connected to a tight spot inside of him: "It's orange, soft and oval in shape, it's the calm sleeping place." Another breath and he noticed a different tight spot on top of the orange: "It's a blue ball that is mad and angry." I invited him to use the finger paints to express these feelings and he mixed the orange on the paper and worked the blue shape directly on top.

I asked if he would like to explore what sound each shape might have, but he moved to the fabric pile instead and pulled out a long piece of orange chiffon, immediately wrapping it around him. Twirling around the room he found its sound and tapped it out on the drum. Next, he uncovered a large swath of stiff, crisp pale blue cotton to represent the angry, mad ball, he held it close as he searched for its sound. With the new addition of fabric, *JC* found movement for these two feelings. He created a dance with the fabrics while I tapped out their sounds. I witnessed him experience the staccato, burdening movement of the cotton, its apparent stuck-ness more limiting compared to the soft, light, flowy chiffon. The tactile and manipulative quality of the chosen fabrics, in addition to the other art modalities used, allowed *JC* to express and process his internalized emotions.

LA had been blind since birth, so I guided her to the floor where I placed some instruments, and we created a call and response game as a simple way to find a connection. I had arranged my pile of fabrics beside us; I was curious if their tactile properties would support her in our sessions to offer a new level of freedom and independence. Monty Lyman (2019) tells us that "blind people have been shown to have better discriminative sensory touch than people with sight….the brain essentially rewires itself to compensate for a lost sense" (p.117).

LA enfolded each fabric, threading it through her fingers, pressing it into the palms of her hands and finally letting it skim across the softness of her cheeks. Each textile elicits a memory, and her stories unfurl. Velvet - the dress she wore at a wedding, burlap - the rough carpet at home, leather - the family couch, sequins - her mother's bag, and the organza - the water at Bowen Island. With this new language *LA* began to express her thoughts and feelings. She was conflicted by the iridescent spandex, examining it as it lay on her skin, then throwing it away only to scoop it close again. Although the texture was not necessarily notable, its subtle shimmer was the first indication that *LA* appeared to experience both light and dark tones and described how this fabric symbolized both her calm exterior and boiling mad internal.

To demonstrate how her frustration and anxieties felt, she picked up the heavy black cotton, brown stretch suede and burlap and began kneading and pummeling with her hands before pushing them far across the room. Their density and elasticity provided a safe container for a physical release to transpire yet stayed intact for new avenues of play. In contrast, her fabric that represented feeling good, was a soft pink organza with a delicate beaded applique. *LA* created a collage by gluing the frustrating fabric next to the pleasant fabric and began to dialogue with the two sides whilst gently stroking them as they responded. I believe this unique tactile

connection provided her with an important resource for effective communication and problem solving.

As our sessions progressed, *LA* became more imaginative. Her story, The Adventure of the Tortoise and the Eel, required select fabrics layered over her so that both their weight and dimensions informed her movements. I wrapped myself in a thin silk sheet and together we ambled and slithered across the room, where, like a tortoise, she tucked her head inside, completely swathed in the blackness. Emerging from the drapery into the light, brought a new joy and by repeating this action, I witnessed her shaping the intensity of the darkness and taking control.

A, on entering the art room, stepped into an imaginary world and, using finger paint, he created the story of a mad green goblin. After, he rummaged through the textiles pile for something green to wear, then quickly changed direction and landed on a new fabric. It had a stretchy, two tone quality that he used to embody both a monster who was sinister and frightening and one that was good. By adding sounds and movement he began to fully explore each persona without restraint in the safety of the space. In the following session, with grey fun fur tied around him as armour, he shaped a variety of textiles into props and obstacles to conquer, an icy lake, a fiery bridge, and a precarious rocky path. It was necessary for him not only to guide me safely as his companion on this journey but also for him to triumph against each impediment.

T was a small child, who only started speaking when he sat on the soft fun fur. His preferred play was the sand tray and animals, where his stories would unfold and were often repeated from session to session, lots of soldiers, killings, animals dying and dinosaurs biting each other. I noticed how important it was for him to sit on the same fabric each time he played

with the sand tray, so I enquired if the characters in his story might also like blankets. Together we cut up little squares of the softest velour and he gently placed them into his story.

With this new addition, I witnessed his voice change to a whisper and his demeanor softened as he became protective of the characters, using the fabric to create a warm, safe sanctuary with food and gifts for the animals. After weeks of fighting battles in the sand, *T* found a resolution through play, provoking a shift that enabled him to feel more secure in both the art space and the classroom.

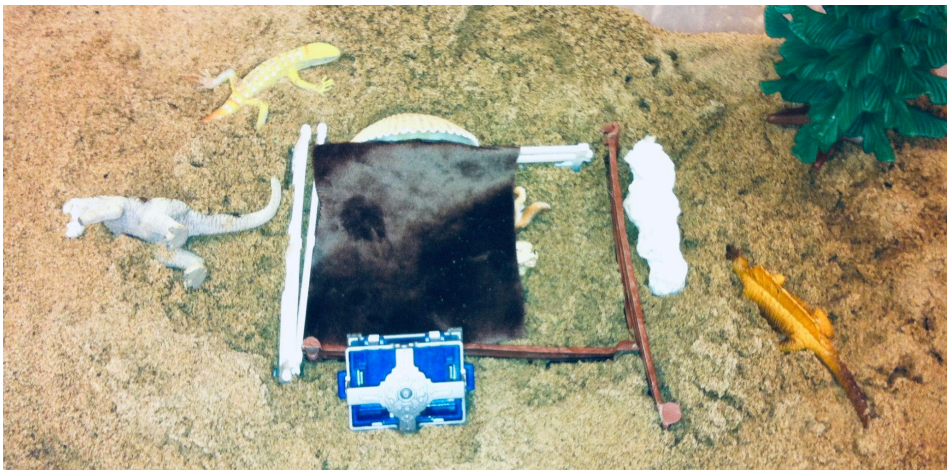

Figure 6: Sand tray with blankets

I was hopeful that using fabrics in my sessions with this 10-year-old would provide the support he needed to integrate with his classmates. He was a selective mute, who only conversed with his younger brother at school and both his parents and teachers requested I meet him, as past attempts to encourage him to open up had been unsuccessful.

In our first meeting he carefully explored the small art room, the materials, sandbox, and my basket of fabrics. He gravitated towards the sand tray, figures and animals and sat beside them with the soft fun fur draped across his lap, occasionally nodding in response to my

questions about the direction of the play. In his story, the family needed protection from sand and water, so he built a structure with the various twigs and fences. I offered him little precut blankets and watched as he layered them to provide an indestructible shelter when they were threatened with sandstorms and flooding. *TI* worked diligently to create durability and constantly tested the fabric until he was satisfied that it would provide a safe place for his family.

In the following weeks, I invited his younger brother to join us to get a sense of their relationship and introduced fabric to them as a form of costuming. I would read aloud a short story and they choose which roles to play. By enacting characters in a story, and supported by his brother, he gained confidence to use his voice for speech and laughter, often interchanging tones, and textiles as he navigated roles. It was in this imaginary world, that he felt safe to use his voice, to play with a range of emotions, yet he reverted to mutism when he stepped out of the room and back into reality.

When my practicum ended at the end of the school year, I created a cloth as a form of aesthetic response to my relationship with the children and the experiences I had witnessed.

Figure 7: Aesthetic response cloth

I created a pocket for each child into which I placed a poem and across each of their initials I traced their movements with stitching. The fabrics that encircled the pockets were used by each child in the sessions and served as a tactile reminder of their exploration, play and healing. The cuts in the cloth around each pocket allowed me to push the ribbons of fabric through with my fingers, to shape and twist, maneuver and manipulate the pieces into place. Handling the fabrics provided an instant connection to the children and gave me an understanding of the possibilities of using fabrics within expressive arts therapy.

This is for you,
a foundation
a comfort for anxiety
your platform to express,
your armor

Here the green goblin left the page.
good monsters met with bad,
obstacles were conquered.
The blue was your ocean of tumbling waves
and your protective sky.

Here was release, support,
freedom to be yourself without judgement,
a place to let your imagination soar.

Here wrapped in grey and blue,
cocooning your body,
you slowly emerged
with wings of pink and orange and flew.

Figure 8: Student A pocket detail and poem

Figure 9: Student JC pocket detail and poem

The day of blue and orange.
Inner sensations oozed
From your fingertips
Mixing and moulding on the page.

Tight, oval, orange
Moved through your body,
Angry ball of blue
Pushed and gripped you awhile.

You gave them a voice, texture, movement
And with each drumbeat,
The crisp blue cotton crashed through the air
While your gentle orange danced.

This is your language,
I speak the same,
texture and touch.

The fabric elicits your memories,
holds your emotions
as it weaves frustration, anger,
joy, love and soothing
within its fibres.

From a place that's safe and secure,
the two sides reveal
an internal boiling,
an external calm.
Frustrations are present,
frightening, overwhelming,
you gave them your anger
and pushed them away.

A new space surfaced
for comfort, joy and play.
Wrapped in fabric, hiding,
enveloped in the darkness
you emerged into the light
and took control.

Figure 10: Student LA pocket detail and poem

Figure 11: Student T pocket detail and poem

Tiny
quiet child
let me support you.

Dip your fingers in the sand
your place to express the holding
'Die die,
Kill, kill
Bite, bite'
let it all go.

Little blankets we cut from cloth
protect
sanctuary
softening

I hold my breath,
I am in awe.

Figure 12: Student N pocket detail and poem

Quiet,
despondent
distrustful,
hands in pockets, shield up.

Slowly,
you begin to explore.
release of the controlled spirit.

Finger to hand,
hand to body,
smile to laughter.

Stepping beyond,
engaging your imagination,
feeling the space just a little.

I understand,
that is enough for now.

Tentative movements,
hesitant speech,
deep frustration.
your brother's disability disables you,
the heavy mantle is not your prison.

Your imagination soared,
held you,
gave you confidence and strength,
to light up your dreams.

Figure 13: Student S pocket detail and poem

Group B

The refugee students I worked with had been displaced from their homeland and endured long and arduous journeys in search of safety and a better life in Canada. They had come from camps or had moved between countries, often with little time to prepare, and had left behind family members and friends without knowing if they would return. In their new schools, with an unfamiliar language and culture, the children struggled to integrate, and share their experiences. The Surrey School Board recognised the importance of helping the children adapt to their new surroundings and appreciated that the non-verbal language of the arts might help. During weekly expressive arts sessions, with groups of four to six students, the children and youth in elementary and high schools used clay, paint, music, drama, poetry and textiles to express their feelings, process their experiences and share their stories.

When working with groups of young children, I found it important to create a dedicated area that was separate from the arts space. One that could provide a transition between the noisy classroom they had left and the expressive arts place they were entering to facilitate an opening and closing ritual. I created a large multi-textured fabric circle on the carpet and noticed that the children would immediately gravitate to it. Many of the groups had limited English, but the textile circle provided its own dialogue in a tactile language that was all inclusive. Over time, I recognized how the child's choice of fabric to sit on provided insight into their emotional needs. A child could spend the whole session with a fabric wrapped around them while they explored the arts. Others would stroke and manipulate the cloth during our check ins, gradually calming as they rhythmically moved their hands back and forth across the surface. For some, the fabric would transport them into an imaginary world where they explored with colour and texture.

Figure 14: The fabric circle

Many of the children had not had access to art materials, but cloth was multicultural, a known entity that was comforting and connected them to memories of home.

I worked with the younger children in small age-appropriate groups and noticed that regardless of their country of origin, they shared similar experiences. Over the weeks, their playful exploration with the arts materials revealed their joys, fears, anxiety, sadness and anger while gently holding their stories of loss, longing, dreams and resilience. They delighted in speaking their own language, dancing to their cultural music and teaching me their customs and traditions all while opening a window to their reality of war.

In our early sessions the translation app on my phone was invaluable and my pronunciations of words, a source of amusement for the children. They were eager to share their unique stories of their homes, communities, and journey to Canada in their art, and in the process they made new connections and found an outlet for expression.

My experiential research began with a focus on themes such as home, safety and identity and loss and noticed how seamlessly the children gravitated towards the fabrics and integrated them into their art.

Home

I invited them each to choose a large piece of fabric from the basket, they draped it over two chairs like a tent and brought pieces of fabric inside that reminded them of home. They drew their memories of home, what it meant to them and how it felt both inside and out. *O* from Somalia, drew an image of a house made of clothes. She remembered being five years old, the house was made of sticks and covered in old clothing stitched together. They slept on cushions,

pillows and blankets and her parents cooked outside. She remembered it fondly, it was a time when the family all lived together, as they had moved many times since.

Figure15: Somalia Houses

Photograph: OlafUnverzart-Phasesmagazine

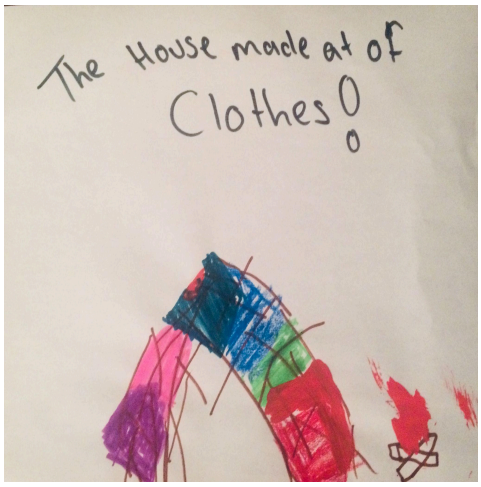

Figure 16: The house made of clothes by *O*

Safety

In one of our sessions, the children shared that they did not feel safe in Surrey. Even though they had experienced the effects of war, they missed the freedom of going out into their communities. With clay, found materials and fabric, the children created a vision of their safe place. *O* used clay and sticks to recreate the frame of the house of clothes and each week, as she added a little to the simple structure, she shared stories of her childhood in Somalia, and the excitement and fear she had felt at leaving.

Figure 17: O - Home structure

Figure 18: O - Sewing the cover

Figure 19: O - The safe place

The house in Somalia had been transportable, the sticks were easily bundled and the fabrics wrapped around them assured a form of protection whenever the family moved to a new place. The layers of dust embedded in the fabric bore witness to her family's endurance and

strength in the face of poverty. *O* created a permanent structure with a solid clay base, and transformed the home with gold paint and brightly coloured fabrics. As she stitched the little pieces together, she created her safe place, safety for her was being with family, and her family represented home.

Identity

The students in both the elementary and high schools struggled with identity, they were fiercely proud of their countries and cultures while at the same time, they longed for acceptance and to integrate into their new school life. They disliked the label *refugee,* as they felt segregated by it as if it defined them. The older high school students regularly included images of their country's flag in their art works, their pride for their homeland was evident, as was their sadness and their sense of loss.

Figure 20: Flags of our homeland

These images led to in-depth discussions with the students about how and why colour and symbols were used to represent their countries, and led to an invitation to use fabric in the space. The students shared memories of sewing with their parents, either by hand or on the machine and were excited to create a flag that represented their uniqueness.

The Flag of Me was a project that started with the students listing their personality traits, they then chose colours and symbols to signify those qualities and mapped out a design for their flags.

Figure 21: O-The Flag of Me

'I drew a flag to represent my personality,

I picked 4 colours that represent me

Teal, red, orange and brown.

The teal represents friendliness…I am kind to everyone.

The red represents gratitude…I am grateful for my family, friends and what God has given me.

The orange represents hope, I always have hope that one day my country will have its freedom.

The most important one is brown, it represents independence.

I am an independent person; I am unique and I like to do things myself.

I am not afraid to show who I am.'

The students traced the designs onto strong yet flexible fabrics such as cottons, twill and silk and cut, pinned, fused and sewed the images to bring them to life.

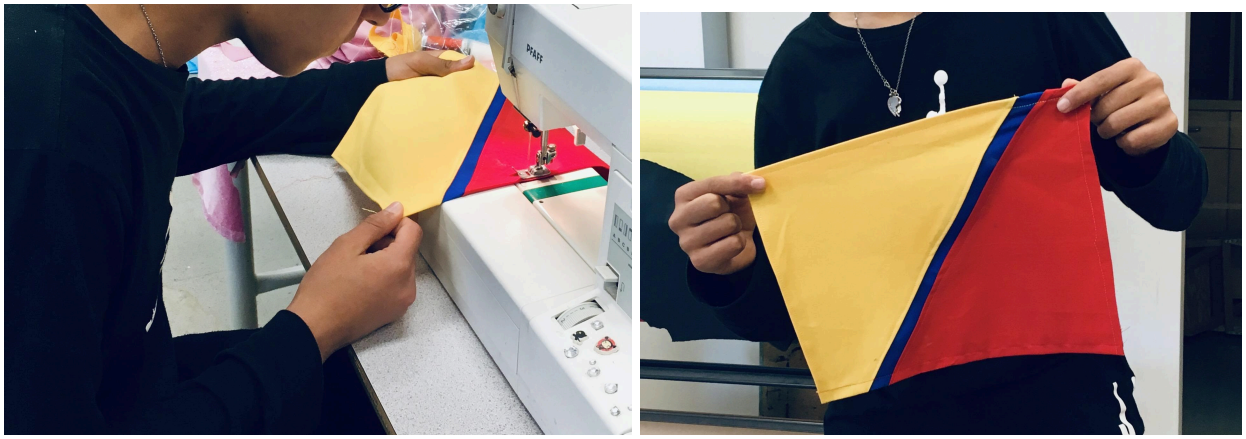

Figure 22: M - Sewing The flag of me

Figure 23: The Flag of me -completed works

They enjoyed designing their individual flags and felt adept at working with the fabrics and mastering the sewing machine. Creating these pieces was calming, it helped them step into their imaginations, take a break from painful memories and express their individual personalities in the cloth. I invited them to visualize a place where they might one day fly their flags as a symbol of their identity and achievements. Stepping into the imagination allowed them a freedom of choice, something that had eluded them in their journey to Canada.

The students in both the elementary and high schools spoke of their lives back home, their friendships and their experiences in school. They were often quiet in their new classrooms, unsure of speaking up because of the language barrier, and unable to share their feelings with their teachers. In direct contrast the expressive arts space provided a safe haven, where they could be loud and animated in play, exploration and expression. I was curious about the unique polarities of feelings that they harbored daily and how they navigated them in the school environment. Using large pieces of paper taped to the wall or floor, the children drew around each other to create a frame for the piece and used paint and fabric to share the polarities of their internal and external selves.

Figure 24: M - Calm/Angry

*Figure 25:*O - Happy/Sad

The addition of the fabric pieces helped the students have a tactile connection to their emotions, touching the tangible piece produced bodily feelings that related to their experiences in the world.

K from El Salvador, integrated fabric to identify both her happy and sad side in her image and vividly illustrates how textures such as fun fur, leather, burlap and cotton can be used as both an expression of feelings and a connection to memories.

"My hair turns different colours when I'm happy.

I'm happy when I'm ice skating.

this is when my energy is up and

my shoes can't handle it.

The blue is when I'm crying.

My heart is turned to stone.

My heart stops getting colour.

This is like the card my dad gave me ,

It turned black because I am sad.

This is like the dirt when they buried my dad."

Figure 26: K - Happy/Sad

Memories

The students related to the textiles immediately. They buried their hands in them, brushed them against their skin, brought them close to smell or wrapped them around themselves. Their memories and stories instantly surfaced and appeared to stitch and weave into each other's lives as relatable lived experiences, forming a new tapestry of connection.

J from Somalia closes her eyes as she feels the textiles.

Burlap- she remembers the cows in her village, they would use this kind of fabric to make bags to fill with grain.

Black vinyl- she laid it down to sit on to milk the cows.

Soft undulated grey shiny fabric- her mum's bedspread, brought from her village and now on her bed here.

Purple chiffon- reminds her of her sister's engagement dress.

J from Syria makes a collage with the fabric.

Black leather- The sadness, it is always there.

Yellow cotton- The fear, I was scared going from Syria to Lebanon

Blue irridescent - For water, traveling by boat, I couldn't swim.

Brown stretch knit– My strength and bravery.

Pink sparkly organza- My happiness that shines out strong.

Loss

All the students I worked with had suffered profound loss. With little or no time to say goodbye and no idea if they would see their friends and family again, their sadness was ever present and difficult for them to process. I wanted to give them a special place to keep their memories and brought shoe boxes and my basket of textiles so that they could create a *memory box,* as a physical holding place for the memories that were uniquely theirs. They examined the fabrics carefully, then cut and glued them to the outside of the boxes, to create a container that was protected, soothing and symbolic.

"I choose the moon and stars so that my memory box can sleep.

Blue is for sadness, for when my dad died and my mum cried.

Red is for blood.

Green is for me being supported.

Pink is for peace."

Figure 27: Memory Box

Introducing fabric into the expressive arts space was pivotal for the students. They appeared more relaxed, due in part to the tactile connection, but also the nonverbal form of expression gave them respite from the struggle of speaking in English. The textiles became their transitional objects, which they carried in small swatches to soothe them when they became

agitated. The groups became more playful, often wrapping it around each other as a costume or adding it as an accompaniment to a spontaneous dance.

Group C

The five women in this research group, *JS, SR, LP, KG, KM*, ranged from age 27-50 and were all enrolled in a two year expressive arts therapy course. The number of sessions with each woman varied and, similar to Groups A and B, a range of art materials including fabric was available in the art space. I recorded how textiles had been incorporated intermodally and each woman completed questionnaires outlining their experience with fabric as a therapeutic tool. It was wonderful to see how creatively the different textiles were brought into play, how they were an instantaneous language for the women to identify parts of themselves, recall memories and problem solve. A drawn image reimagined in cloth brought forth not only a movement that could be manipulated, cajoled and reshaped, but also a fresh perspective.

Over a number of sessions *KG* worked through an issue using movement, clay, drawing and fabric. After the initial check in, she played with movement to connect to a sensation in her body and the image of a figure of eight with a ball emerged. The ball was reimagined in clay. Its form arrived as she explored shaping it at various speeds and adjustments were made as it dried and cracked. She expressed her feelings about it in an image called the “The Mundane Place.” Beside her was a soft furry cushion, which she stroked with her eyes closed. This active touch produced an inner feeling which I invited her to draw. She named it ‘The Best Place,’and described how it felt. She saw the figure of eight as a constant in her life and it appeared to separate these two places. I was curious if there was a bridge between the two, but she had noticed something else, less tangible, "The Draining Distraction.” Moving to the fabrics, she

chose ones that related to her images and words and arranged them cohesively on the floor. By shifting from the two dimensional drawing into the three dimensional emerging piece, she was able to pause, stand back, walk around and view it as a whole. In the process of the shaping, there was an ongoing dialogue as her hand touched the fabric, an external tactile searching for the piece that corresponded with her inner feelings and lived experience.

As she arranged the textiles, she was unsure of where to place the burgundy velvet and left it tightly rolled to one side, not interacting with the others. The grey "mundane" was threaded through the continual figure of eight, and the "draining distraction" was a sparkling turquoise package close to the loop. She called it the "Fabric of Me" and took a swatch of each piece of cloth home. In our following session she returned to the same fabrics, and shaped them into a new configuration. She recognised the burgundy velvet as her calm and peaceful safe space, and laid it out as the base so that the other fabrics had a place to land. Now, the loop was unwound and appeared more fluid, the grey mundane more malleable and the sparkly distraction was turned inside out with its underside of netting turned over it. It was present but more as a reward than an interference. *KG* added a new fabric into the image, a black leather, the part of self that was solid, structured, protective and everything she needed.

Figure 28: Moving from the 2D image to the 3D form

Another woman in this research group *JS* used different textures to identify the different characteristics of herself and her family members. She arranged and pinned the pieces together, then wrapped them around her. Experiencing this multi-textured cloak against her skin, produced a new sensation that came from the weight of fabric and led to a closer examination of how and where the pieces were placed. When she laid it out again to look at, her dialogue with the fabric shifted and she explored why some fabrics took up more space, while others were less visible. Pinning the fabrics allows for pieces to be instantly connected, but also highlights textiles that are too dissimilar as to support each other, such as the light and wafty silk organza and the harsh and rugged burlap.

Providing small swatches of the fabric used in the sessions to clients has become instinctual, as I have observed that it continues to have a purpose outside of the therapeutic space. Collier (2012) suggests that "clients can make a textile amulet as a form of protection in the future, something they can calm themself with if they are fearful" (pp. 101-102). It can act as a crossover from the session, a tactile piece to hold as a reminder or may take on a new healing form.

My client used the fabric swatches to make something new as a form of closure. She described that "the answers didn't come in words, but in sewing the fabric together to make a brooch. It was quite surprising and powerful. The work seemed complete, everything had found its proper place. No words were needed." (JS, personal communication, February 2, 2024).

The five women in this research group completed a questionnaire that highlighted their experiences with fabric within the expressive arts therapy session. Their feedback from a client's perspective was invaluable to my thesis.

The questions were:

1. What is your earliest memory of fabric?
2. What is your experience of working with fabric in Expressive Arts Therapy sessions? Positive or Negative
3. Did working with textiles bring a new awareness to your relationship with fabric? Tactile? Memories? Emotions?
4. Did you find it useful, and would you work with it again in an Expressive arts therapy session?

All the women had childhood memories associated with fabric ranging from fun and playful and comforting to painful and uncomfortable. As a cloth, it had yielded endless possibilities for creativity. A red sparkly fabric had formed the backdrop for a puppet show and a large handmade quilt was used to wrap and roll in. There were tactile memories of softness against skin but also ones of itchy, fussy clothing that caused discomfort. Some fondly remembered their grandmothers and playing with siblings and cousins, while for others, their memory of a piece of clothing was intrinsically linked to a difficult life experience.

I was aware that for some of the women, fabric was a new medium to work with and they might be unsure of how the work would unfold, however all of them described their experiences with textiles in the expressive arts therapy sessions as positive. One woman described how working with textiles had been a new territory for her, one that she entered cautiously. She noted that in playing and manipulating the fabrics she had become more comfortable with them. Others connected to it easily and found that using cloth brought a different depth and awareness to issues they were exploring. One of the women described themselves as a tactile person and that it made sense for her to use textiles as a form of expression.

> Fabric feels like something that is easily moved, layered, or cut, which mirrors how I feel about my own experience of life. I like how working with fabric can sometimes create a landscape across a room that I can move through, and I find that being able to physically hold the fabric is very grounding. (SB, personal communication, February 26, 2024).

The women revealed that their experiences with the textiles were profound, surprising and overwhelmingly positive. They described a sense of freedom in the work that hadn't been present with other art mediums.

> With visual art I struggle with the permanence of paints, pastels, and markers. Once I've marked the page, I can't change it without starting over, or seeing the "ghost" of the image I've painted/drawn over. With fabric I found that I could create shapes and images that I could move without traces of their previous form (other than traces I wanted to keep). (KG, personal communication, March 9, 2024)

I was curious to understand if and how working with fabric had changed their relationship with it. The women appreciated how touch connected them to their bodies and helped them articulate their feelings. As one explained:

> I typically have difficulty integrating therapeutic work into my body, so fabric has been very helpful in adding physical sensations via touch. In working with materials that could be shiny, matte, dull, rough, smooth, sparkly, soft, etc, I could find additional relationships to my images that wouldn't have come to me had I made the same image with a traditional art medium. (KG, personal communication, March 9, 2024).

The women observed that working with the textiles easily connected them to their memories. They were surprised how even the fabrics they had chosen without realizing, had such strong associations for them. It was described as a strong and powerful tool, one that could provide an emotional connection to past experiences and offer a sense of realness to hopes and possibilities for the future. The importance of textile diversity was also apparent,

> Both the colors and textures of the fabrics brought emotional awareness to my work- but the "movement" of fabric was huge as well. The stretchiness or rigidity of a fabric would sometimes come to represent or highlight or allow me to discover my feelings in regard to certain topics I was exploring through fabric. (KG, personal communication, March 9, 2024).

The experience of working with fabrics in expressive arts therapy sessions had been positive and prompted some of the women to start building their own collections. They appreciated that textiles seemed to have an inherent playful quality and they were inspired to use them more, both creatively and therapeutically. One woman shared a desire to explore collaging with fabric by cutting and gluing pieces onto cardboard or wood or paper. I think this would be a simple yet effective way to work with cloth to create a tangible piece and certainly something I will include in further sessions. The feedback from these five women was illuminating and highlighted the healing properties that exist with and within textiles. They summed up their experiences, by sharing that they found working with fabrics, creative, playful, revealing, inspiring, deeply connecting, satisfying and a valuable and necessary tool in any expressive arts therapist's toolkit.

Group D

I had wanted to work with parents and carers of special needs dependents for some time and approached the organization PosAbilities with a proposal for an expressive arts workshop. As a parent who falls into this demographic, I was keen to share how the arts could be used in a playful way to express emotions, but I also wanted to give them a space to connect and

experience a different form of self care. Nineteen parents signed up for the workshops that ran once a week for two hours at two different locations.

I provided each participant with a notebook to record their reflections and each week I introduced different art materials that fit into the low skill/high sensitivity format. The sessions always began and ended in a group circle. I introduced opening warmups that were fun and expressive and a closing circle where the participants could share their experience while passing a ball of wool to each other. The tactile experience of holding the wool helped them feel more calm and focused as they spoke and passing it across the circle was a playful way to create a web of connection.

The participants enjoyed some of the workshops more than others depending on their level of comfort with the art materials, but all were pleasantly surprised by the depth of the work and the insights they gained. The third workshop was entitled Fabric-Memory and Meaning and proved to be the most relaxing of them all in terms of working with a known modality. I had all my fabrics laid out on a large table before the session started and noticed how some of the participants immediately gravitated towards them when they arrived.

I started the session with a warmup and asked the group to imagine they were applying moisturizer to their arms. I guided them to slowly move one hand down their opposite arm, from the shoulder to the wrist and play with the speed and pressure. This provided not only a sensory connection between their hands and clothing but also an awareness of the sensation of textures against their skin. As an introduction to the fabrics, I asked the group to choose a fabric that represented them at that moment, then cut a swatch and staple it in their notebooks. They wrote down three to five words to describe the chosen piece and circled the one that stood out the most. Adding the words “I am” before the circled words brought laughter and surprises.

Separate from the large swaths of fabric on the table, I had cut nineteen hand size swatches of different textiles that the group could pass to each other. They examined the pieces one by one with their eyes opened and closed and wrote down any memories that surfaced. They then paired up to share their stories and the shifts that occurred when they had explored solely with touch.

For the main art process the group congregated at the fabric table where we discussed the idea of making a cloak of fabrics to represent the different parts of themselves. In order to make this manageable, the fabrics for the cloak would be small in size and attached to a piece of art paper. I invited them to search for a cloth that might represent their strengths and cut a strip from it. This was followed by finding pieces that represented a weak spot, family, a part of you that is fun, a part that needs down time or quiet and a part of you that not many people know. Once they had cut their pieces, I invited them to play with the layout, were any strips wanting to be multidirectional? Did some strips weave together, did some take a more central role than others? These cues helped the group get to know the fabrics in a different way, they found new ways to shape them before pinning or stapling them to the art paper. They gave their images a title and in our closing circle they shared how the experience had been for them and the message they had found in the work.

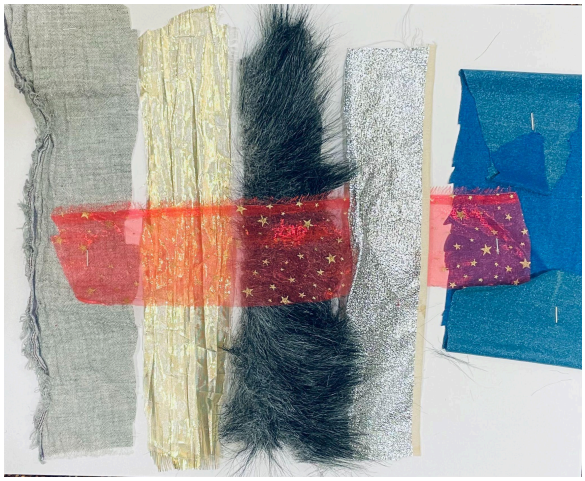

Figure 29: Workshop with Parents -parts of self

The participants all filled out a questionnaire at the end of the session which helped me gain insight into their memories with fabric, any surprises or difficulties they had experienced in the session and what they had learned about themselves.

For ten of the participants, their earliest memories of fabric were connected to family members. Six of them had been taught to sew by their mother or grandmother and remembered them sewing clothes for them and their dolls. Items of cloth and clothing were remembered as beloved and comforting such as a special hat or soft cozy blankets. Others associated fabric with childhood activities like shiny dance costumes and rough towels at the beach. Five of the parents recalled either playing with fabrics or a particular sewing or embroidery project they did as children.

I was curious to know if their experience in the fabric workshop had brought any surprises. For twelve members of the group the ability to easily tap into memories came as the biggest surprise. Some noted that they tucked away painful memories, but there were many wonderful ones that cried out to be remembered. Others appreciated how touching the fabric had been a new and fun way to explore joyful and playful memories of childhood experiences and the time before they had children. One of the participants shared that working with fabric had tamed her inner critic, something she hadn't been able to do in previous sessions with other art modalities. Play and art-making made her anxious, but she had been intrigued by the workshop and had wanted to try something different. Even though I had introduced low skill art mediums in the other workshops, handling the fabrics had been calming and had helped her to engage in the session in a more relaxed way. The group found that choosing fabric to represent parts of oneself had been interesting. Some of them found the dialogue between the visual and tactile conflicting. Pieces they were not necessarily attracted to, remained in their images due to a deeper connection through touch.

I had no knowledge whether the parents had experience working with textiles and an important part of the feedback was discovering whether they had found anything difficult in the

session. The responses were varied. Identifying a strength or struggling to choose just one fabric at the beginning of the session was challenging for some. Others noted that while permitting certain thoughts and memories to surface was difficult, they also found it healing. A couple of the parents mentioned that it had been easier to connect to the textiles swatches than to find a piece of fabric to represent a part of themself. One participant observed that their need for perfectionism was an obstacle. By overcoming their aesthetic desire for symmetry they allowed themselves the freedom to play. The parents expressed that they had learned new details about themselves in the workshop and found that the work had a message for them. They noticed that there was a need for self care and balance in their lives. Some felt that they were on a journey of discovery, one that required them to trust themselves and let go of expectations and past judgment. Others spoke of their resilience, that they were stronger than they thought, and how being flexible was important in life.

Even though both good and bad memories had surfaced in the session, they found it easier to lean into the positive aspects. They noted that there were lots of bright and dark spots to explore, and had found that expressing through fabric and sharing with the group was an enjoyable process. One of the carers shared how her image illustrated her two sides, the one she outwardly projected, versus how she felt and viewed herself. One fun and sparkly and the other darker, quieter and more guarded.

One parent titled her piece “Chaos out of order.” She saw her ability to keep things in order as her strength, but recognized that she needed to shift and embrace the chaos in her life. Another called hers “Intertwined,” as she saw her life as a tapestry intertwined between the past and present.

Messages of affirmation came forth: “Be brave, be a warrior,” “Fun matters, remember the good stuff” and “It is okay to be me and recover lost parts, everything works together and is valid.” One parent noted that she had learned more about her husband during the workshop and the image he created, as he generally had a hard time expressing himself verbally.

As Heidegger suggested with the term *readiness- to- hand*, connecting to the objects through touch changes how we perceive them (Wheeler, 2020). One participant in the workshop saw a particular fabric being passed around and as it came towards him he made a decision about it and the memory that it conjured up. When he held it in his hands and closed his eyes and looked inward, the memory he had preconceived and projected vanished and was instantly replaced by a completely different memory and feeling. He noted that feeling the fabric gave him a different opinion than only seeing it, and that he felt things deeply when he physically handled them.

It became clear from the groups’ sharing in the session and the feedback from the surveys, that working with the fabric as an art modality had been both illuminating and comforting. There had been surprises at the depth of connection through touch and ease at the inclusion of something familiar as a conduit for expression. For some, this versatile material had altered their perception of art making and invited them into a world of play.

Discussion

During my field work with four different demographics, I was surprised at how seamlessly fabric was welcomed and integrated into the sessions. Children and adults alike gravitated to it, always greeting it through touch.

The children in group A used the fabric in the sessions to calm and soothe, but also as part of their expansive play. They could easily dive into their imaginations from the moment they sat on the fabric circle and would use large pieces of fabric to create characters and movement. I noticed that texture seemed less important than colour, size and weight of the piece, but density was often a necessity to withstand high energy play. They used large swaths of fabric to immerse themselves, create alternative realities and build shelters Also of note, due to their shorter-lived experiences, their responses were very different from those in the other groups. They were more in the moment than reflective.

Group B was comprised of refugee children and youth. Due to their fear of displacement and war, these children had to grow up in an instant and were less inclined to use the arts for imaginative play. The destructive nature of trauma had kept their imagination at bay, and they used paint, clay, music, movement and fabric to keep their stories about their culture, heritage and family alive. I noted that they were attracted to the fabrics and easily engaged with them in a practical way as a costume piece or scarf for a spontaneous dance. This was the first time I saw the group play freely, and dancing became a ritual for the closing of our sessions. I was curious if more textured fabrics might be effective in the work and found the integration was in fact a turning point.

I observed that the group found it easier to access memories when playing with these multi-textured fabrics, their stories were less about traumatic events they had experienced and more connected to their family and childhood. Their tactile connection to the textiles was, I believe, pivotal in helping them to process overwhelming feelings, too painful to speak of and provided an outlet necessary to help them integrate and flourish in their schools. It was important to pay attention to recurring themes and images in the work. I noticed a shift when I created a

fabric project entitled “The Flag of Me.” Using an object that had symbolized their homeland, and by creating their own designs, they built a bridge between their collective trauma and their individual voices. I was privileged to work with the children and to witness their incredible stories of resilience in the face of extreme hardship and loss. I felt blessed to be shown a snapshot into their young lives that included a distant memory of a childhood filled with joy, laughter and freedom in a beautiful country called home.

Although I have an instant connection with fabrics, I was unsure how incorporating them into expressive arts sessions would translate for other adults, and found that they worked incredibly well. Both Group C and Group D had no hesitation handling the textiles and most of them found it easy to express their emotions with them. The soothing qualities were of great importance and the adults often stroked pieces automatically as a way to feel calm and grounded. The fabric proved to be a non-threatening conduit to access the imagination and an unbreakable shape shifter that could be formed and reformed. Moreover, it served as an easily accessible and transportable transitional object that had more longevity than traditional art materials.

Of all the demographics I connected with, the experience of working with the parents in Group D was one of the most profound. This group of adults had serious, responsible lives and the freedom to play was not an option. Regardless of their fears and doubts surrounding the arts, they recognised that they needed a place for expression and were open to exploring the different modalities. Overall, I believe it was the simple tactile connection with the textiles that gifted them a non-judgemental creative outlet, interlaced with depth and insight.

Working with fabrics was the most popular of the art materials offered and opened the door to further possibilities of textile related forms of expression and storytelling.

As a further area of enquiry, I am interested in how judgment blocks creativity and imagination and the part that fabric can play in breaking down those walls. For many, the tactile relationship with cloth and clothing is an around the clock experience. We have access to an art medium that is in our daily lives, is affordable, sustainable and weighted with memories.

My research with parents and carers of special needs dependents highlighted the need for more community art based workshops that use fabric as a means of expression and narration. Through textile work such as quilting, story cloths, and collages there is potential for change in the way that stories are told and memories are held. It is a potent life companion, a cross-cultural, bilingual, known entity with diverse properties that supports play, exploration, and expression. I hope that my thesis has illustrated, what I believe is, a small piece of the perhaps untapped potential of this unique art material.

Conclusion

At 61, I've discovered that you're never too old to face your fears, (or strive for a master's degree). For most of my life I had an intense phobia of speaking in front of people, but as a therapist I've seen others be brave and face their struggles. I couldn't ask that of them yet not step out of my own comfort zone. Bringing this expressive medium to groups of parents who, like me, each have a special needs child, was a pivotal experience and gave me the confidence to continue to walk this path.

Although I've had a close relationship with fabric all my life, I undervalued it as a therapeutic tool and was therefore unaware of its place within expressive arts therapy. As a costume designer I had worked with textiles for so long as a means to an end, that I never

appreciated its healing qualities. It is only upon reflection, that I see that fabric has kept my life stitched together and that it has the capacity to support others in their journey of healing. When I experienced working with fabric in the context of others, it woke me up to the realization that it truly is a human language.

My observations of how fabric was being incorporated into the therapeutic setting piqued my desire to look deeper at this unique medium. It begged the question, how does the dialogue we hold with fabric, which encompasses our memories and emotions within its fibers, support expression, healing and growth within an expressive arts therapy setting? The unfolding of this thesis has led me through historical, scientific, philosophical and personal studies to garner an understanding of how we experience tactile processing through the skin, our non-verbal dialogue with fabric and the incomparable sense of touch.

By exploring our historical relationship with cloth and clothing through an emotional attachment lens, I discerned that regardless of our visual attracter, it is within the warp and weft of the fibres that stories are held. Here lie the memories of our lived experiences that can surface sensorially through sight, touch, smell, and hearing. Our tactile connection with textiles permits a dialogue that is both external and internal with a medium that both embraces and imparts. The lattice of fibres fabricates a net strong enough to hold our pain, sadness, anger, frustration and joy while also providing comfort and support.

The literature review and research, served to illustrate the importance and versatility of textiles to support healing and growth. Contrary to other studies that noted time as a factor for not including textiles in the therapeutic setting, my research showed the opposite to be true.

By including it in its natural state as cloth, the phenomenological access is instantaneous without necessarily depending on a traditional crafting technique. It was versatile, easily

transportable and required little time to clean up compared to art mediums such as paint and clay. It worked intermodally, added to sand tray stories and clay, or used as props and obstacles in drama. It could intensify a movement or help provide a new perspective by morphing a two-dimensional image into a three-dimensional form. By providing fabric in a range of textures and sizes, we can tap into new ways of supporting the client to access memories and emotions and let poiesis emerge. The possibilities are endless.

My Nan encouraged me to play with fabric at a very early age, giving me another language with which to express myself. This healing dialect wrapped around me like a warm blanket and protected me during my challenging life ahead. Nan provided me with tools for creativity and healing that lay at my fingertips as if she knew that I would need a rudder to guide me. I feel an even deeper connection to her now and appreciate how working with fabrics and textiles gave her the ability to cope throughout her own life. I believe that sewing uniforms for the nurses at St Thomas' Hospital helped heal her after she was widowed. Through the phenomenology of touch, Nan introduced me to a love of fabric on which a foundation of creativity, curiosity and resilience were built. Her heart and soul weave throughout this thesis and I know she would be very proud.

My mother passed away last year and writing this paper has been a healing process. Regardless of the absence of her touch throughout my life, I have the exquisite little yellow dress she knitted that carries the imprint of her fingers within its stitches. Holding it enables me to connect to the part of my mother that was missing from my life and fills me with empathy and compassion.

Embarking on this thesis was both challenging and empowering. Writing has never been my strong suit and so I looked at the road ahead with fear and apprehension. However, the work

has gifted me the chance to rewrite my own narrative. I wrote daily and discussed nightly, sitting for hours at my laptop, and drinking endless cups of tea. When anxiety gripped me, I sewed it into fabric squares, knowing that the textiles could hold a space for me.

My sons witnessed their mum commit to a new role as a student and that shift had a ripple effect. Elliott learned the importance of household chores and became aware of my usual workload in running the house. Throughout this thesis, I read constantly. The more I read, the more interesting the conversations that sprung forth and my partner, Gary, and I would spend endless hours discussing themes such as phenomenology, archeological finds and skin receptors.

I was concerned that moving from an established career as a costume designer to that of a therapist was risky, but as the work progressed, there was a shift in my thinking. I loved exploring the healing properties of textiles on a deeper level and by including them in my work, I found the bridge that I needed. My two worlds were not separate but woven together and could work hand-in-hand to bring comfort and support to others.

This journey has been incredibly healing for me. I've seen a new side to myself, and I feel different. I'm proud of what I've accomplished and have more confidence in my abilities. As I move forward from a place of love, truth and passion, I close this with a full heart.

Figure 30: Me in the yellow dress and with my rabbit. Vancouver 1963

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Appendix

Expressive Arts Program

Framework: Expressive Arts is designed to support refugee students who may have experienced or continue to experience challenging life circumstances that impact their daily learning. The program helps students with refugee experience settle into their new school environments.

Program Description/Objectives: Students are guided by Expressive Arts facilitators through arts-based expression and exploration. Students use play and the arts in a variety of forms to express experiences and feelings that may be difficult for them to put into words.

Goals: To use the arts as a vehicle to support students' positive integration into school life and to help them manage their feelings and experiences so they can be free to learn.

Target Population: Students who have refugee experience and are in need of extra support during the day.

Greta Hedley
Program Organizer
Expressive Arts
Expressiveheartstherapy@gmail.com
Telephone: 604-728-8487

Surrey Schools

Program Partners: A team of Expressive Arts Facilitators led by program organizer, Greta Hedley, work with the students. Each facilitator brings with them a breadth of experience working with children, adults, and families in multiple settings.

This 4-week (on-going) workshop will provide parents of dependants with special needs the opportunity to freely express through the arts.

Group size: 20 max
Session length: 2hrs

Objectives: Community and support. To provide a moment of freedom to create mental and physical space from concerns that occur with their everyday responsibilities and help move toward discovery, insight, and empowerment.

In each session we will use the expressive arts (painting, sculpture, movement, fabric, poetry etc.) to unlock thoughts and feelings as well as learn stress - reducing grounding techniques.

Participants do not require previous experience with the material, the simplicity allows for sensory stimulation, imagination, and reflection.

'The arts have the ability to usher us into the world of the imagination and enable us to consider new possibilities in our daily lives' (S. Levine, 2017)

Expressive Arts Therapy with Fabric Questionnaire.

1. What is your earliest memory of fabric?

2. What is your experience of working with fabric in EXat Sessions? Positive or negative.

3. Did working with textiles bring a new awareness to your relationship with fabric?

Tactile?

Memories?

Emotions?

4. Did you find it useful, and would you work with it again in an EXaT Session?

Workshop for parents #3 Fabric, memory and meaning.

Warmup:

Lotion- sweeping the hand down the arm as if applying lotion, notice the difference with a light or firm pressure.

Feel your feet. Curl your feet in your socks/shoes. Can you feel the fabric or pressure. how is it different on the tops or soles of your feet?

Choose a piece of fabric that represents you. Cut a small piece of fabric, staple it in your book if you have them.

Write down 3-5 words to describe the piece of fabric.

Circle the one that you resonate with the most.

Passing the ball to each other if you are ok to share with the group can you say "I am ……

Memory squares Pass around the squares of fabric, look at them with eyes open, feel them with eyes closed or looking down.

Jot down any memory that surfaces.

Does it make you think of a person, a place, a specific relationship? If there is nothing, that's fine too. I'll give a time of when to pass the fabric on.

Create the cloak of me: Building a cloak to represent you, come to the fabric pile, Can you find a fabric that represents **Family,** cut a strip that will fit on your paper. choose a piece to represent your **strengths**, a **weak spot-** choose a piece to represent that part of you that is **fun,** part of you that needs **down time, quiet…**the part of you **that not many people know.**

With the large safety pins, straight pins or staples connect the pieces in any way that you would like.

Are some parts bigger than others?

Do they want to lie multi directional?

Or interwoven?

Are they flat or folded and reshaped.

Feel free to manipulate them in any way.

Give it a title.

Does it have a message for you?

Before we return to our closing circle: You choose a piece of fabric at the beginning of the session, look & feel that piece, has there been a shift or change inside and if so do you want find a new piece or stay with the original piece ?
Closing with wool and words.

Fabric Workshop Questionnaire:

1. **What are your earliest memories of fabric?**

2. **Expressing through fabric today, was there anything that surprised you?**

3. **Expressing through fabric today, was there anything you found difficult?**

4. **What did you learn about yourself?**

5. **You made a cloak representing different parts of yourself:**
   What title did you give it?

6. **What message did it have for you?**

7. **Do you consent to my using photos of your work in my thesis on Fabric in Expressive Arts therapy? YES. NO.**

If YES, please sign: _____